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THE WORLD'S #1 VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE



THE TOP

300 GAMES

OF ALL TIME

TRIUMPH OVER TRADES

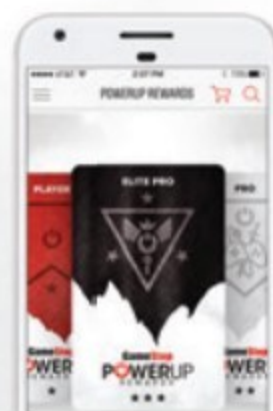
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Issue 300 Celebration



ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
andy@gameinformer.com
@GI_AndyMc

We started the journey to 300 issues back in 1991. We weren't the first video game magazine, nor the best, but we had our humble beginning and that is always a great place to start. The magazine was 16 pages. The design ... well, let's just call it quaint, more *Ranger Rick* than *Vanity Fair*.

I still remember my excitement when I saw that first issue. For me, it was a dream come true. I knew then I was going to make this magazine as long as they would let me. Turns out, I am still doing it 27 years later. Hopefully, you will agree with me when I say we have come a long way since that first issue, and maybe you have some fond memories of the issues like I do. We have been lucky to have some amazing games grace our covers over the years, and been blessed with the works of many great writers on the pages in between.

When issue 300 came upon us, we knew we needed to repeat the feat we attempted at 100 and 200 issues – tackle the most difficult list you can ever imagine: the top 300 games of all time.

Lists like this are both a joy and torture to create. Editors, like readers, have different tastes. One person's treasure is another person's trash. Editors argued. Editors got mad. I'm sure you will find something wrong with the list (spoiler alert: There are at least a couple games on this list I hate with a burning fire, but they made the list nonetheless). Such is the nature of lists. Regardless, I am proud of the list we made, which factors historical importance, how fun the game is to play today, and those elements you just can't put your finger on. You know greatness when you play it.

We knew we needed something special to wrap around this special issue, and so we set out on a quest to do something different with our covers. I have always had a special place in my heart for the cover of Atari 2600 game cartridges. While the covers were always about the games, I always felt the box art conveyed a sense of how it felt to be there in these early games. Early 2600 games were literally dots, but their covers illustrated the fantasies brought to life, and that art defined those games. If you never had the chance to experience the joy they bring, we did our best to capture their spirit on these issue 300 covers.

We brought in artist Greg Semkow who graced us with five incredible covers: Four games that place prominently on the list, and one throwback to the early days of both *Game Informer* and game magazines. They represent a dream of being in a place, either directly in the game or in that special place where the gamer connects to an interactive experience as they "press start" and begin that journey to a new world.

I hope you love these covers as much as I do. Enjoy the issue. I can't thank you enough, whether you have been reading for years or this is your first issue. Hopefully, we can be friends and continue to celebrate games and gamers together each and every month within these pages and on our site gameinformer.com. See you at issue 400.

Enjoy the issue.

THE COVERS



PRESS START



RED DEAD REDEMPTION

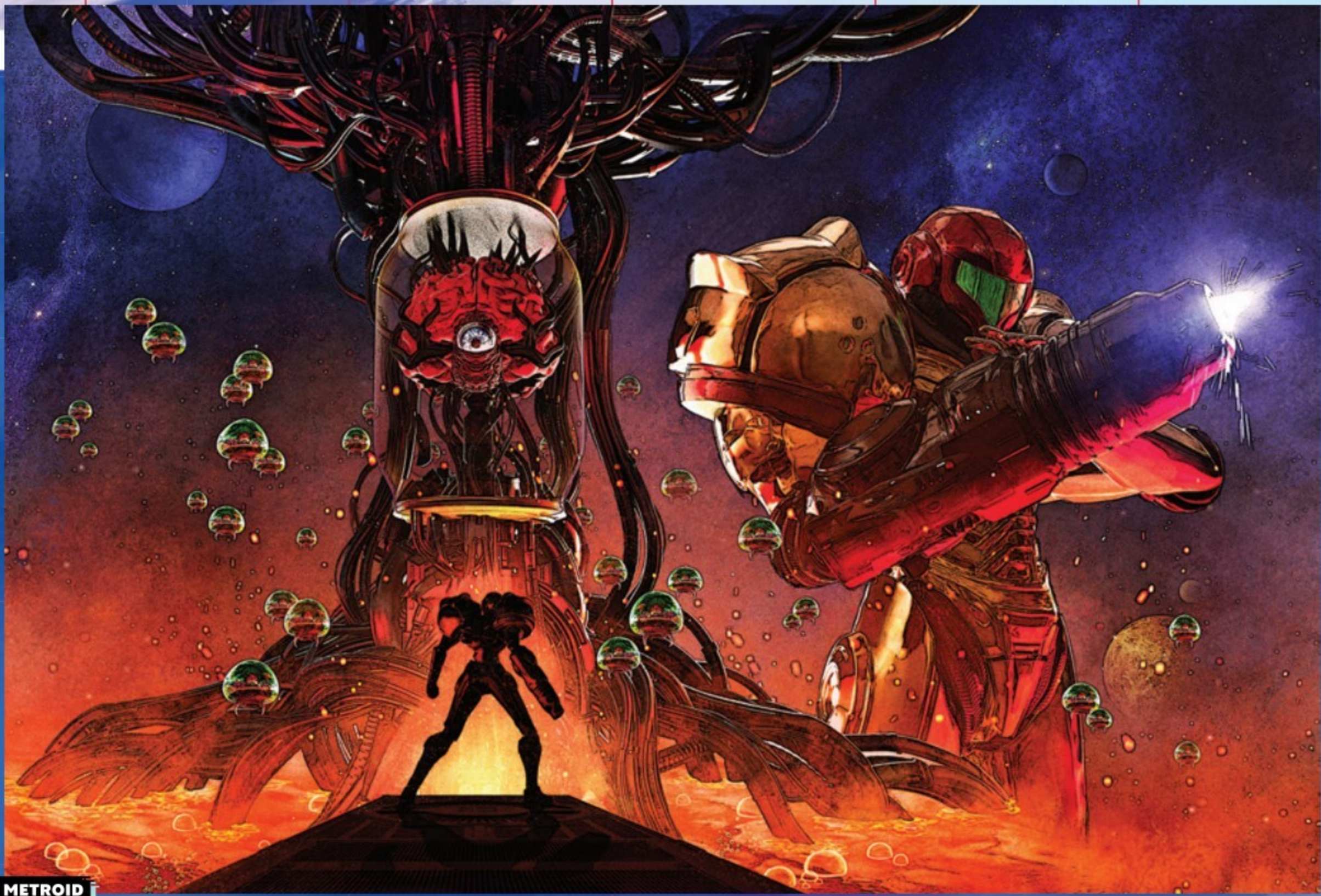


MINECRAFT

Greg Semkow's (@gsemkow on Twitter) amazing covers were designed to capture the spirit of early Atari 2600 box art, which brought a dream-like realism to the games they represented. We hope you enjoy the cover you received, and if you want to track down another cover, head to gameinformer.com/covers for more information. We even collaborated with Fulton Brewing on a beer to celebrate 300 issues. You can learn more about that on page 87.

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METROID



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

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18 The Top 300 Games Of All Time

It has become tradition to rank the best games of all time as we reach these centenary-issue milestones. It may surprise you to learn that coming up with a list that large we could all agree on for our 300th issue was very, very difficult. But it will all be worth it when the world shakes hands and agrees that we did it. We made the perfect list. These are the best 300 games of all time.



12 The Continued Risks Of Crowdfunding

Raising money from fans to create games has led to some fantastic experiences. It has also, on occasion, led to absolutely nothing.



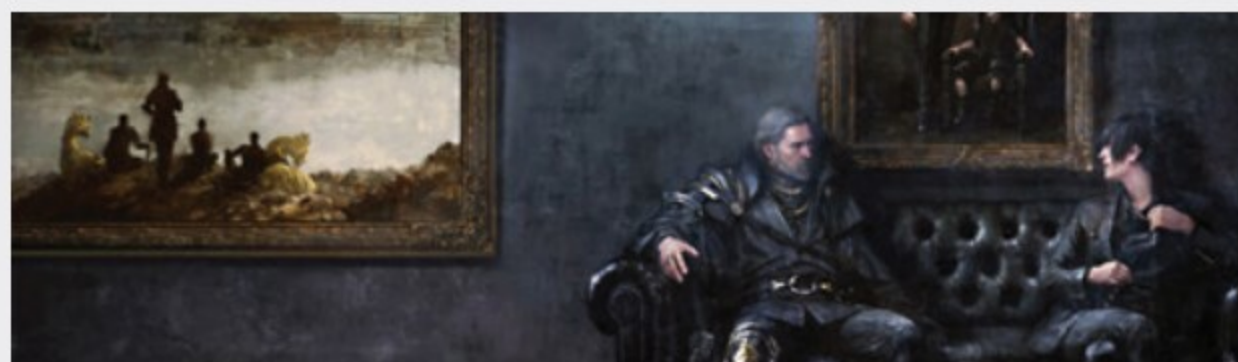
14 Gear

Analogue's Super Nt may be the best way to play your SNES cartridges on a modern TV.



16 Game Infarcer 2018

Game Infarcer is here, and this year's outrageous, offensive, and hilarious jokes make all previous editions look like garbage.



96 Game Over: Our Favorite Covers

This is our 300th issue, but thanks to myriad alternate and special covers, we've had over 350. These are some of our absolute favorites.

games index

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Fallout 4



Make Any Vault Dweller Smile!

Display these statues to
show your love of Fallout without
having to shell out too many
bottle caps.

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What better way to kick off our Top 300 issue than with complaints about our last massive list? VR, Battlefront II, and indie support were also popular topics.

It Never Fails...

Hello, I'm a longtime reader with a question about your Top 50 awards. In the latest issue, you named Zelda: Breath of the Wild as your Game of the Year (The Top 50 Games of 2017, issue 298). However, if you do a weighted ranking of the staff's personal Top 10 lists (with each #1 receiving 10 points, #2 receiving 9 points, etc.), Horizon Zero Dawn comes in first with a total of 113 points. Moreover, Super Mario Odyssey is second with 104 points, while Breath of the Wild comes in third with 95 points. Breath of the Wild also won the Reader's Choice award, so obviously many people like it, but why didn't the game that your staff clearly liked better win? I thought Breath of the Wild was merely mediocre, while Horizon Zero Dawn was my personal GOTY, so I might be a bit biased. LOL. Anyway, keep up the good work!

Kyle Garcia
via email

Ahh, the weighted ranking argument – believe us when we say we wish it were that simple, Kyle. Unfortunately, we rank the year-end Top 50 like we do all of G.I.'s big lists: by locking the entire staff in the

conference room and yelling at each other until we arrive at the brink of insanity. Ultimately, Breath of the Wild came out on top this year, but if it's any consolation, our pro-Horizon editors will use your calculations to prove how wrong and stupid we were. See? We complain about our lists too!

Keep It Coming

You gave PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds the Best Shooter of the Year award last issue, while Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus won the Reader's Choice. PUBG was awarded a 9.5 in the same issue, while Wolfenstein II got a 9.75. So how did PUBG win Shooter of Year while earning a lower score than Wolfenstein II? You also listed the poor sales of good single-player games like Wolfenstein II as one of 2017's biggest disappointments. Aren't you helping fulfill that prophecy by not giving those great titles their due?

Travis Curl
Houston, TX

I was surprised to see that only Daniel Tack listed Divinity: Original Sin 2 in his Top 10 picks (as his number-one game). Games are currently plagued

by microtransactions, lack of content, shallow gameplay, and the lack of player choices. One out of eighteen editors thought this title, which managed to be nostalgic yet fresh, incredibly deep, wrought with tough choices, and featured some of the best gameplay in the last year, was worth a spot on their list. I recognize that it may not be for everyone, and that most of the other games on the list were very good – and that lists are subjective. But this still feels like a big oversight. Kudos to Daniel!

Edward Rueter
via email

As much as we loved B.J. Blaskowicz's latest antics (and have given them plenty of love in our coverage), there's no denying the genre-shifting juggernaut that is PUBG. However, once again the Top 50 isn't decided by individual review scores or popular vote – and the conversations/arguments we have over every entry are why a game like Divinity: Original Sin 2 can make the list without wide-reaching staff support. If you're still miffed about our year-end rankings, though, flip to page 18; we promise you'll forget all about the Top 50 when you do.

Contact Us

Send your questions, comments, and rants to feedback@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured in the magazine!



Always Bet On Indie

I just wanted to say that Matt Bertz did an awesome job on his article about Take-Two's new indie publishing division (The Creative Bet, issue 298). I can't even begin to express how excited I am – indie developers with triple-A backing! Why did it take so long for the big publishers to figure this out? Imagine what Inside, Hollow Knight, or Cuphead could have been with Private Division backing them. This new branch of Take-Two is exactly what the gaming industry needs. This is the future of gaming and it's looking promising.

Jonathan Thompson
via email

As far as risky business bets go, Private Division's backing of creative indie projects seems like a noble one. We're with Jonathan in hoping that Take-Two's new venture is successful enough to inspire a larger trend; the more creative freedom and support indies have, the better their games will be.

Server Segregation?

Electronic Arts and Disney probably anticipated huge dollar signs for Battlefront II, especially with their implementation of microtransactions. Yet as most of us are aware, that decision has dropped the game into a black hole it may never escape. I believe Battlefront II is still salvageable even with the uber god-like microtransaction-fueled players running around. EA should create servers for players who have never bought microtransactions and other servers for those who have. This way players who don't want or can't afford to use microtransactions can be competitive against like-minded players on their servers, while those who wish to boost their abilities with microtransactions can also fight worthy competition. EA can still make coin via their microtransaction system, and we'd all have a game that's fun for Jedi Masters and Padawans alike.

Joe Shebell Jr.
via email

We probably would've gone with a Sith Lord/Jedi Master analogy ourselves, but the point is well taken. Unfortunately, a separate server solution breaks the cardinal sin of online multiplayer games: It splits the player base up into haves and have-nots (or in this case, don't-wants), which can have a negative impact on matchmaking and the long-term health of the community. Not as much as balance-breaking microtransactions, mind you, but it still isn't great. However, we're also assuming EA wants a solution that would let players ignore the temptations of paying more cash. We're guessing EA has a more lucrative solution to the backlash in mind, but if they prove us wrong, we'll let you know.



Short Answers To Readers' Burning Questions:

"Is there a Supernatural game coming out based on the T.V. series?"

No, but there should be.

"Will Microsoft ever not charge for Xbox Live?"

Maybe in some Orwellian future where they already own everything.

"As a dad of two kids, I have so many unplayed games. Any advice?"

We suppose it's a little late to answer "celibacy," huh?

Worst Subject Line To A Feedback Letter:

"Tell me I'm wrong"

Question Of The Month:

Alright, let's get it over with: What was our biggest, most shameful omission to the Top 300, and why?

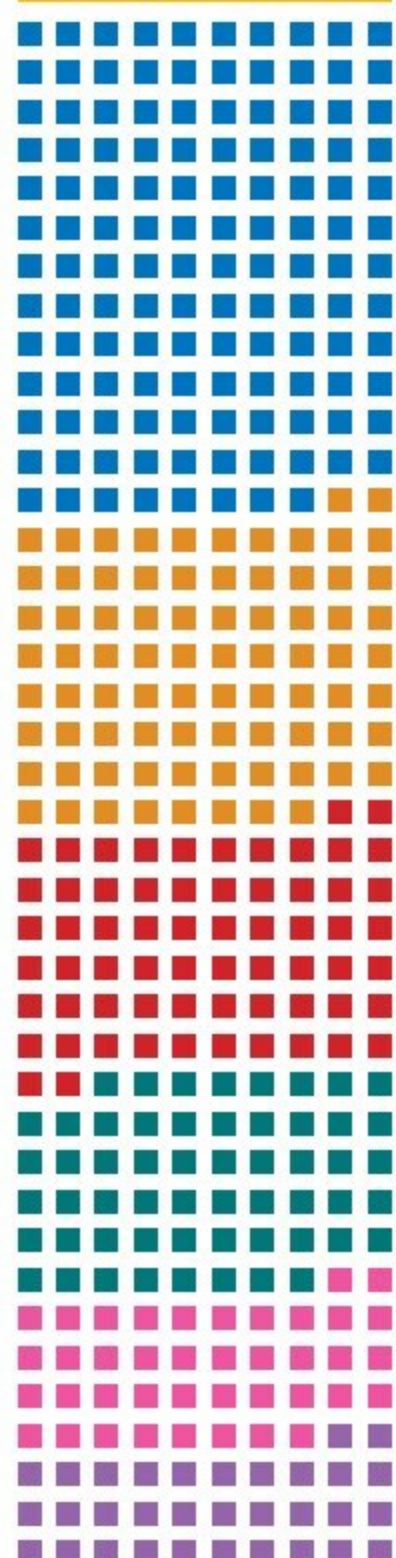
gi spy



PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

(Left) This month UFC Flyweight champion Demetrious Johnson visited the Game Informer office to play some UFC 3 and beat up Shea. Sadly it was more of the former than the latter. **(Right)** G.I. fan Thomas Hankins joined us for an episode of Replay this month, after donating big bucks to help children during our Extra Life marathon. Watch the episode at gameinformer.com!

On Your Mind



- Game of the Year Picks
- Top 50 Jeers
- Battlefield II Contemplation
- Nintendo 2018 Anxiety
- Private Division Excitement
- Top 50 Cheers



Summing Up '17

In issue 298, we asked readers to name their pick for 2017's game of the year. While *Breath of the Wild* had its backers, others eschewed the Reader's Choice winner. Here are some of the replies.

I have to go with *Horizon Zero Dawn*. It's fresh, it does a fantastic job with its world building, the story is engaging, and the enemy A.I. is fantastic, which makes the combat thought-provoking and fun. The game is also stunning to look at. Definitely one of the best games for the PS4, and the best new IP, in my opinion.

Chuck Herm

My favorite game of 2017 was hands-down *Persona 5*. The level of detail that Atlus put into this game – from the menu design, to the music and real-life representation of Tokyo – is something you do not see a lot of these days. It proves to the industry that these social-sim games and JRPGs are far from dead. I cannot recommend this game enough.

Andrew Hartley

Middle Earth: Shadow of War. The extremely entertaining combat along with its engaging storyline made the game a ton of fun. Also, the graphics were out of this world, and the amazing Nemesis system gave a lot of the orc captains creative personalities. I say "a lot" because some are not creative, and basically just say, "I'll kill you!" Other than that, *Shadow of War* is in my top 10 of all-time.

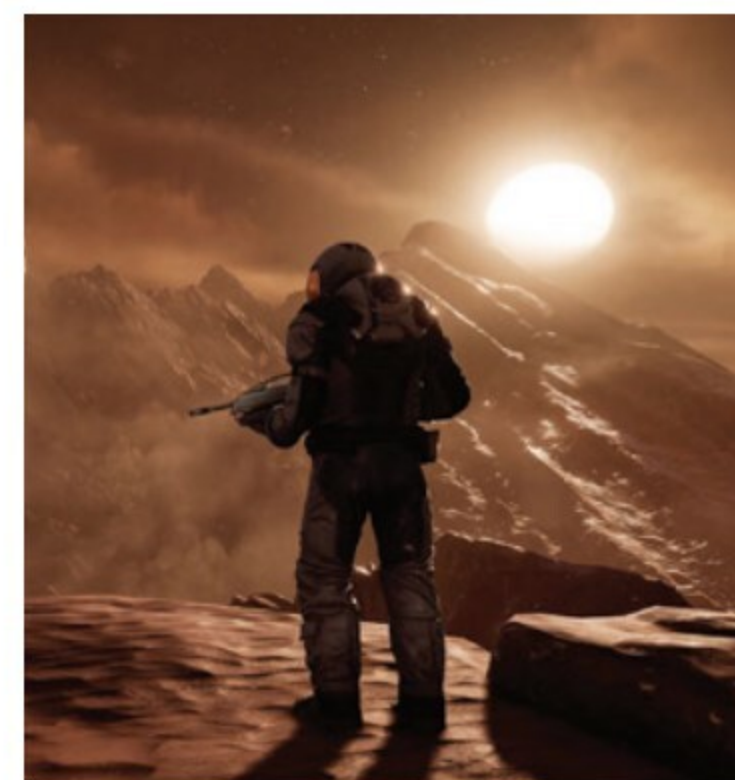
Thomas Porter

Worth The Wait

I'm contemplating buying myself a PlayStation VR for my birthday, since I don't have a high-powered PC but do own a PS4. However, I've been wondering about all that goes into it. I do not currently own a camera or Move controllers or a headphone set, though I've seen some pretty neat bundles online with reasonable prices. But I've also been hearing a lot of PlayStation 5 buzz. I know that I'll probably want to be one of the people who buys it at launch, and I'm wondering if I should wait for that to drop before buying PSVR? This is a pretty big purchase and I don't want to make a mistake. Also, I don't pay a lot of attention to the industry, so I'm not sure how much support PSVR is getting and if developers will continue to make games for it. Does it seem like it's going to stick around?

Bernie Tapia
via email

We would hold off for now, Bernie. While we don't have any information about a potential PlayStation 5, we do know that there simply aren't enough quality PSVR experiences yet to justify the hefty price tag (much less all the peripherals you mentioned). There's no harm in waiting for VR to prove itself, whether that happens this generation, next generation, or never at all.



(Left) Epic Games' Zack Estep and Nick Chester showed off their amazing bar-posing skills at PlayStation Experience.

(Right) Reiner caught up with Oculus' Jason Rubin during The Game Awards. Sadly, they didn't win the award for Best Co-op Team.



(continued on page 10)

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FX
FEARLESS



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1



WINNER

1 Brian Odell

We weren't sold on WoW's pandas until right this very minute. Nice job, Brian!

2 Michael Broderick

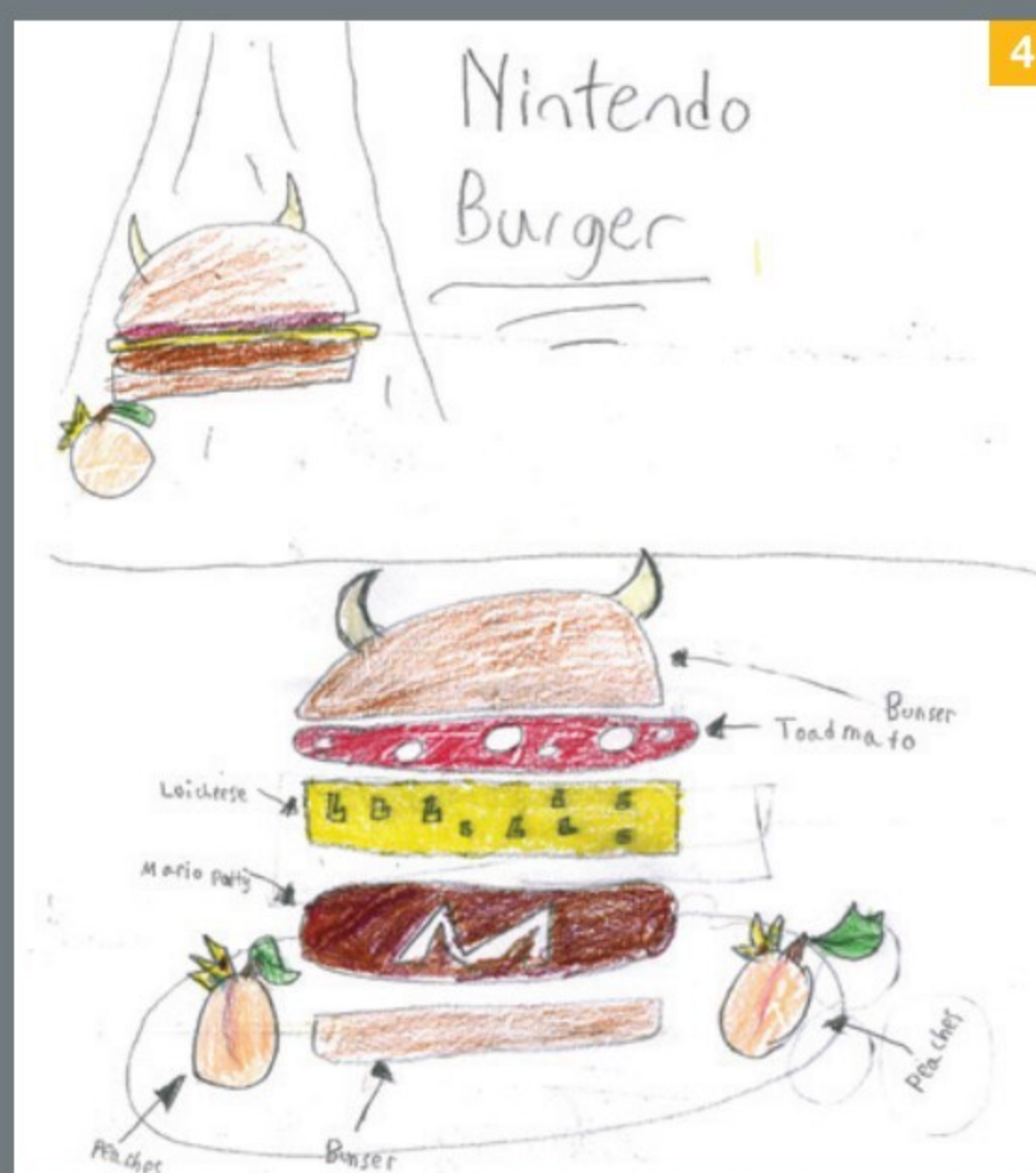
If you're still not sure whether video games qualify as art, we present to you: Video Game Dogs Playing Poker.

3 Laura Cesa

The G.I. community has always considered watching our entire Overblood Super Replay as a badge of honor – but now it's a pin too!

4 Grace Jennings

Granted the peaches are a bit of a stretch, but otherwise this Nintendo Burger is a perfect storm of Mario puns.



» Submit your art for a chance to win our monthly prize «

Please include your name, email address, and return address. Entries become the property of Game Informer and cannot be returned.

Send to: Game Informer Reader Art Contest, 724 First Street North, 3rd Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401 | Email to: ReaderArt@gameinformer.com

(Left) Here's Game Informer Australia editor David Milner partaking in some couch co-op with a new addition to the family. Say hello to Riley Milner! Congratulations, David!

(Right) 3D Realms vice president Frederick Schreiber stopped by the G.I. office this month to show off their new hardcore shooter, Ion Maiden.



TOM CLANCY'S

RAINBOW SIX SIEGE



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INCLUDES 8 NEW OPERATORS AND MORE



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XBOX ONE



PS4



rainbow6.com



UBISOFT

continued

The [^]Risks Of Crowdfunding

No matter how mainstream crowdfunding becomes, the gamble remains



System Shock

by Jeff Marchiafava

Crowdfunding has become a popular alternative to the traditional publishing model. Divinity: Original Sin, Darkest Dungeon, and Hyper Light Drifter are just a few of the exceptional titles that started out as fan-funded projects. For every success story, however, there's a cautionary tale that underscores the risks facing potential backers.



Two pieces of environmental concept art from the still unreleased *Unsung Story*

System Shock fans are the latest to feel the sting of a broken promise. Nightdive Studios, a developer that specializes in reviving classic games for modern platforms, successfully pitched a remake of the iconic action RPG back in July 2016. The indie studio was asking for \$900,000 in funding, but closed out the campaign with over \$1.35 million from excited backers. A pre-alpha demo helped convince interested fans of the remake's potential, as did Nightdive's declaration that development was already 25-percent complete, which it asserted made their release estimate "more accurate than usual."

Four months after the Kickstarter campaign ended, the studio updated its release window for System Shock from December 2017 to Spring 2018. That timeline took another turn for the worse this month when Nightdive announced the project is now on indefinite hiatus.

Nightdive Studios CEO Stephen Kick broke the news in an update on Kickstarter, alluding to scope creep as the underlying problem. "Maybe we were too successful. Maybe we lost our focus. The vision began to change. We moved from a remaster to a completely new game."

Kick says the increasing scope led the team to seek out additional funding from potential publishing partners, but ultimately a deal never materialized. However, Kick insists the studio isn't giving up. "I have put the team on a hiatus while we reassess our path so that we can return to our vision. We are taking a break, but NOT ending the project."

Nightdive's plight highlights the number-one problem with going it alone on Kickstarter: Game delays happen all the time, and time is money. When you have a traditional publisher backing your project, they can offset unforeseen costs with savings and revenue from other projects.



If you received your entire budget upfront from increasingly anxious crowdfunding backers, on the other hand, the money simply runs out.

Some of gaming's biggest Kickstarter disasters imploded under similar circumstances. In 2014, Playdek pitched gamers on *Unsung Story*, a spiritual successor to *Final Fantasy Tactics* designed by Yasumi Matsuno himself. *Unsung Story* raised over \$600,000, but after a series of delays the developer announced it had run out of funding and was focusing on other projects for the "ongoing financial health of the company." Development shifted to a new studio named Little Orbit in 2017, who is still hoping for a late 2019 release. In the meantime, Matsuno's story remains unsung.

Then there's the case of Project Phoenix. The squad-based JRPG raised over \$1 million in funding on Kickstarter in 2013. As the estimated 2015 release fast approached, however, director Hiroaki Yura announced the project was being delayed another three years, into 2018. Since then, Yura has been publicly accused of embezzling Project Phoenix's budget by a former employee, an allegation he vehemently denies. Whether Project Phoenix will rise from the

ashes remains to be seen; the latest developer update on the game's website is from June 2017, stating focus had shifted to another project in order to secure more funding.

After reading these horror stories, we can't help but think about two of crowdfunding's most successful projects: *Star Citizen* and *Shenmue III*. Both games seem impossibly ambitious in terms of scope and player expectations. Can their developers really deliver the dream that backers have already paid for? Could any developer?

While the success stories prove there are certainly projects worth investing in, potential backers must remember that game development is always a gamble. Creating a game never goes according to plan. Delays happen. New ideas take time to figure out, which is why even the most lucrative triple-A publishers are wary of branching out from proven franchises. Crowdfunding takes all the risks of big, ambitious games and independent development, and places them squarely on your shoulders – with no legal recourse if things go wrong.

The bottom line? Be careful what you pledge. If it sounds too good to be true, it very well might be. 💎

ANALOGUE SUPER NT

by Ben Reeves and Matthew Kato



Our memories playing old SNES games will last a lifetime. Unfortunately, Nintendo's hardware might not. Many SNES games can be repurchased and emulated on modern systems, but if you want a flawless playback of old SNES cartridges in 1080p, you need something like the Analogue Super Nt.

Analogue uses an FPGA chip to act exactly like the processors inside Nintendo's old systems. This means the Super Nt plays any title in the Super Nintendo and Super Famicom's 2,200-plus game library with zero lag – something even the best emulators struggle to achieve. We couldn't find a game in our vault that didn't work with the Super Nt, and titles like Super Metroid, Star Fox, and Mega Man X looked razor sharp. In some cases, they looked even better than they did on Nintendo's recent SNES Classic system. Those who aren't sticklers for an authentic playback can also stretch their old games into a widescreen format, boost the brightness, add different types of scanlines, and blur/unblur pixels.

The system perfectly pairs with 8BitDo's retro SN30 controller, which looks like a wireless SNES controller, but also allows you to remotely power on/off the system and boasts an internal battery that lasts close to 20 hours. The Analogue Super Nt is a fun, high-tech toy, and it might be the best way to revisit some of your favorite gaming memories, but the price might turn away everyone but hardcore enthusiasts.

SUPERB 

\$189 (console), \$39.99 (controller) | analogue.co



1

1 Drive Hub Racing Wheel Converter

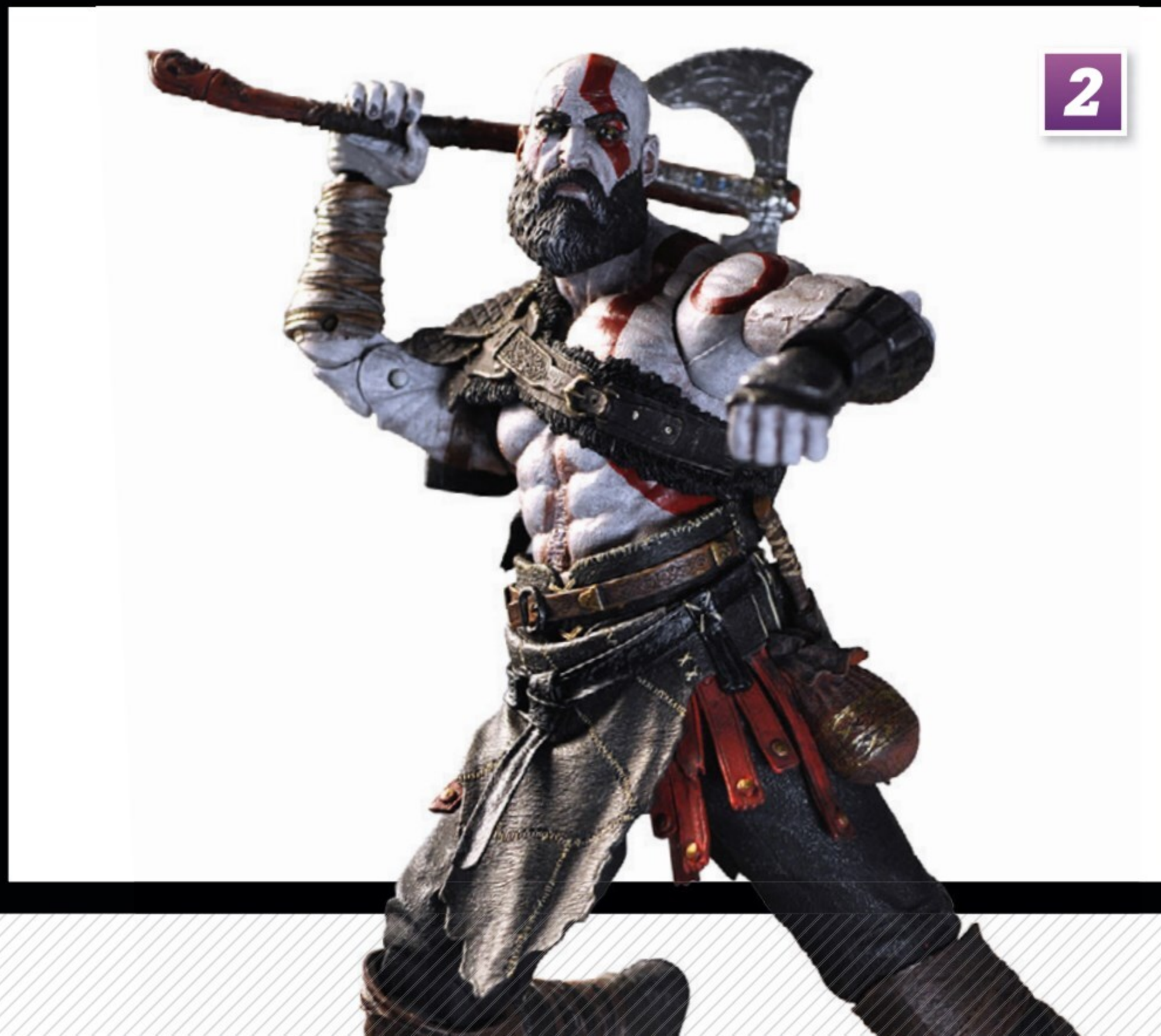
Every time a new console comes out, racing fans wonder if their racing wheel of choice will be compatible or not. The DriveHub converter takes care of that problem by making older force feedback wheels compatible with the PS4 and Xbox One – including accessory support for different pedals and shifters. Hooking the peripheral up to your wheel and console is easy, and the best part of the DriveHub is that it's smaller than a deck of cards. It also has special features accommodating Fanatec wheels (including support for some of their native features), as well as a real-time RPM LED meter on PS4.

\$89.99 | collectiveminds.ca/shop

2 Kratos God Of War Figure

Whether he's battling minotaurs or exploring the frozen wilds of the north with his son, Kratos is always ready for combat. The god-killer might have left behind his lust for vengeance against the gods of Olympus, but Kratos' epic beard is on full display in NECA's newest figure. This incredibly detailed, seven-inch sculpt features 36 points of articulation and comes with Kratos' new axe Leviathan, a dagger, and shield. He might be less than a foot tall, but he's still imposing.

\$24.99 | necaonline.com



2



IRON GOLD BY PIERCE BROWN

Darrow and his fellow revolutionaries are trying to rebuild the world, but a seemingly endless war continues to tear society to pieces in this new book from the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Red Rising Saga.

\$19.99
piercebrownbooks.com

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS VINYL SOUNDTRACK

More than a decade later, the Shadow of the Colossus soundtrack from composer Kow Otani remains heart-breaking and awe-inspiring. These two Vinyl LPs also come in a package that is as much of a piece of art as Sony's classic game.

\$40.00
store.iam8bit.com

THOR: RAGNAROK

When Hela returns to Asgard, she banishes Thor to a deadly gladiatorial planet where he encounters one of his biggest challenges: the Incredible Hulk. This action-packed film from director Taika Waititi is easily one of the funniest Marvel movies to date.

\$19.99
marvel.com/movies

The Good



NINTENDO finally announced a more focused release window for the Switch online service. The subscription program starts in September and costs \$3.99 a month or \$19.99 a year. Along with online play, it grants access to classic games with added online components, as well as eShop discounts. Until the service is live, Switch owners can continue to play online for free.

Quotable

"If even mature and intelligent adults are falling victim to these mechanisms, how are kids expected to respond?"



Sean Quinlan, Hawaii state representative, explains to GamesIndustry.biz his support of multiple bills in the state regulating randomized loot boxes.

16 connect

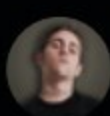
The Bad

Competitive fighting game series *Evo 2018* (taking place in August) will not include **MARVEL VS. CAPCOM: INFINITE** – the first time in *Evo* history a Capcom vs. title has not been involved. The game is not part of Capcom's own Capcom Pro Tour, either. "I don't think people are playing it, and that's the problem," said *Evo* co-founder Joey Cuellar.



Twin Galaxies stripped some of the Donkey Kong high scores from arcade star **BILLY MITCHELL**, including Mitchell's score in *The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters* documentary. The decision came after it was discovered the scores in question were achieved on a PC running MAME evolution software and not original Donkey Kong hardware. This could mean that Mitchell's scores were achieved through multiple playthroughs and stitched together to look like a single, unbroken run. Mitchell, speaking on internet show *East Side Dave*, does not deny that there is footage of him playing on a MAME, but claims there is a separate "original tape" that was given to Twin Galaxies. That tape has not surfaced at the time of this writing. ♦

The Ugly



*Looking for Game Infarcers? Sorry, suckers. You have to wait an extra month this year. Until then, I hope you "enjoy" the 300th issue celebration of this "wonderful" magazine. Sincerely, Darth Clark.



April 2018

GAME RELEASES

Tuesday 03

- › Pillars of Eternity II: Deadfire (PC, Mac)

Tuesday 10

- › Extinction (PS4, Xbox One, PC)

Tuesday 17

- › Yakuza 6: The Song of Life (PS4)

Friday 20

- › God of War (PS4) ❶
- › Nintendo Labo Variety Kit (Switch)
- › Nintendo Labo Robot Kit (Switch)

Tuesday 24

- › Adventure Time: Pirates of the Enchiridion (PS4, Xbox One, Switch, PC)



MOVIE & TV PREMIERES

Monday 02

- › The Crossing (ABC)

Tuesday 10

- › New Girl (Fox)

Sunday 15

- › Fear the Walking Dead (AMC)

Monday 16

- › Supergirl (CW) ❷

Friday 20

- › Rampage (theaters)
- › Super Troopers 2 (theaters)

Sunday 22

- › Into the Badlands (AMC)
- › Westworld (HBO)

Tuesday 24

- › The 100 (CW)

Wednesday 25

- › The Handmaid's Tale (Hulu)



GAMER CULTURE

Sunday 01

True Believers

For the month of April, Marvel is releasing a handful of comic books that outline the origin of Thanos, the villain who will be front and center in the Avengers: Infinity War movie. Along with the first issue of Infinity Gauntlet, these reprints include an Avengers issue from 1963, and Marvel Super-Heroes from 1967. The best part of all: Each issue retails for just \$1, and is 48 pages in length.

Thursday 05

PAX East ❸

Held in Boston's Convention and Exhibition Center, PAX East is a four-day gaming event that gives showgoers a look at the

future of games. Along with hands-on demos of forthcoming games, the show offers a variety of tournaments, pin trading, concerts, and dedicated areas for PC, handheld, and board gaming. This is also a great place to show off your latest cosplay designs.

Wednesday 18

Action Comics Turns 1,000

The 1,000th issue of DC's Action Comics shouldn't be missed, as it will deliver an extensive tribute to Superman from some of the industry's most respected writers and artists. This includes work from Brian Michael Bendis, who left Marvel to join DC's ranks. ❹

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ISSUE **300**



THE TOP

300 GAMES

OF ALL TIME





Over the past 26 years, *Game Informer's* mission has been to chronicle the incredible evolution of games as well as the thriving, multi-faceted industry that creates them. This is a daunting task, but one our publication has staked its legacy and reputation on month after month.

In November of 2009, our staff argued to create a definitive list of the top 200 games of all time. But as gaming has changed, so have the people who make up *Game Informer*. One hundred issues later, the staff is remarkably different, meaning we had fresh new eyes and interesting perspectives to join the longtime editors as we sat down to create a list of the top 300 games of all time. That has resulted in a new list that feels radically divergent from the last time *Game Informer* declared the greatest games of all time.

For that issue, we said the original Legend of Zelda was the best game ever made for the immeasurable influence it had on gaming. This time, you'll find another game has taken its place.

This process was not easy. We debated for weeks. Some of our personal favorites didn't make the cut, but we came together to present what we as a group truly believe are the best video games ever made. Within these pages you will find games that changed the industry forever, games that took players all over the world on virtual adventures and charmed countless quarters from the pockets of arcade patrons as they vied for high scores, and games that broke our hearts with profound interactive meditations on love and despair.

You may, and probably will, disagree with this list. But we hope you enjoy it regardless, debate it with friends, and write to us to share your own unique input. Hopefully we'll see you again 100 issues from now to talk it all over again.

Game on, everyone.

by Game Informer Staff



300 YAKUZA 0

PS4 • 2017

The long-running Yakuza series finally hit its stride in the West with Yakuza 0. This prequel set a decade before the first game told the story of how Kazuma Kiryu got tangled up with the crime families of Japan, and explained how Goro Majima went from a devout, straight-laced businessman to the unhinged Mad Dog of Shimano. The violent, street-brawler action and off-the-wall minigames made the moment-to-moment gameplay fun and engaging, while the dramatic storylines filled with jaw-dropping twists and outstanding human moments shined. With the prequel acting as the perfect jumping-on point for newcomers, and the story providing a compelling narrative for the series' longtime fans, Yakuza 0 resonated with *Game Informer* editors in ways the series hadn't before.



299 WII SPORTS

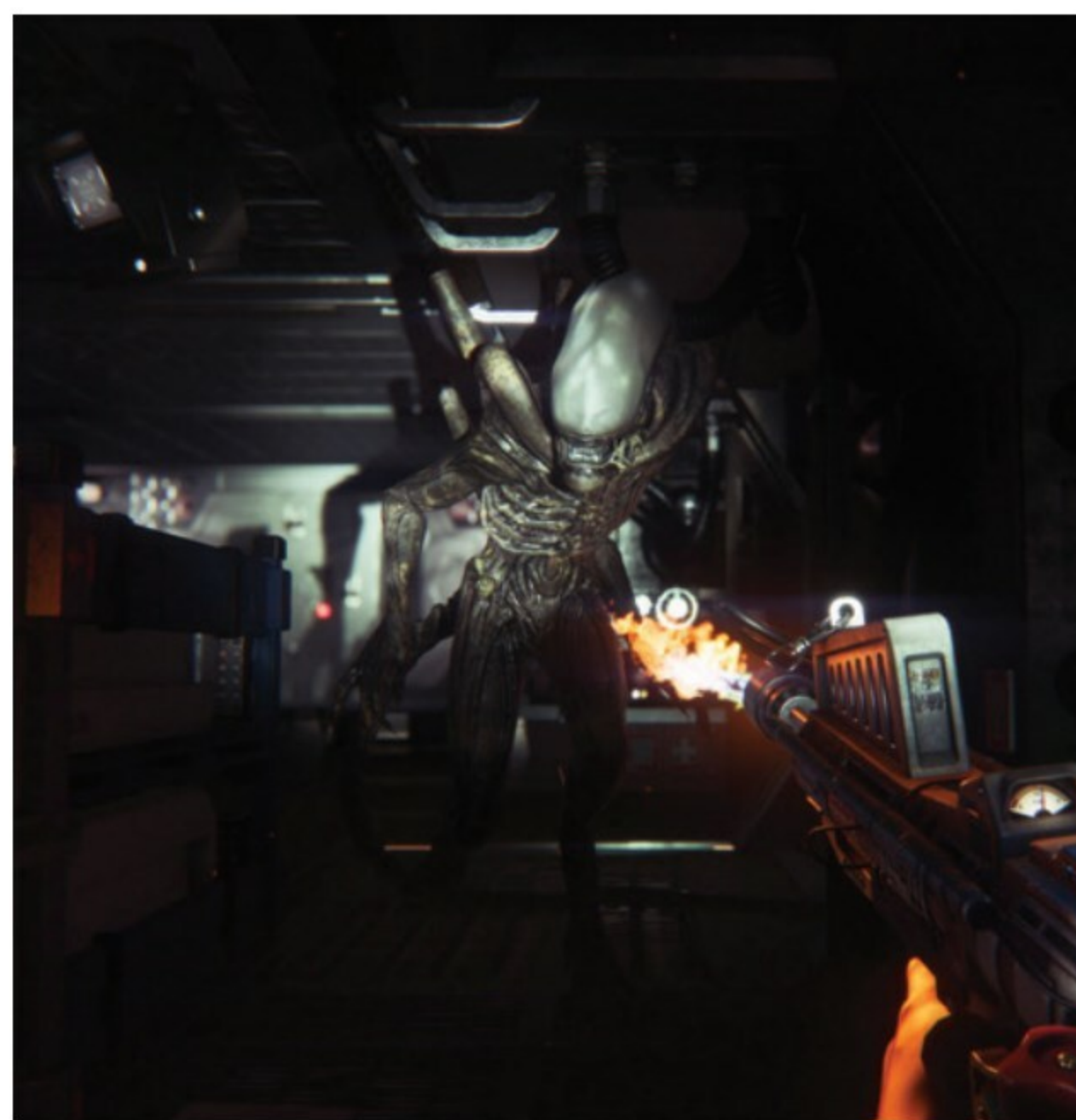
Wii • 2006

Wii Sports became the poster child for the vapid game style that flooded the Wii over the course of its lifespan, but there is a reason it helped sell so many consoles – it's fun. Its virtual tennis and bowling brought in a whole new demographic of players. People who had never touched a game in their life bought a game console to play it and it kick-started the popularity of the customizable, cross-game avatar.

298 ACE COMBAT 5: THE UNSUNG WAR

PS2 • 2004

Star Wars: Rogue Squadron, Crimson Skies, and other notable aerial dogfighting games were in the running for this list, but were shot down by Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War, the finest entry in Namco's long-running series. With over 50 planes, a wide spectrum of missions, and sound design that heightened the intensity of war, The Unsung War pounded out excitement, and even had a great story to tell.



297 ALIEN: ISOLATION

PS4, Xbox One • 2014

After decades of developers trying and failing to authentically translate the Alien franchise to video games, Creative Assembly came along and made it look easy. The survival-horror hit didn't just perfectly capture the retro-future aesthetic of the original film, it also conveyed the desperation, loneliness, and sheer sense of terror of being stranded in space with the perfect extraterrestrial killer on your tail. Alien: Isolation's deadly game of cat-and-mouse was even more tense because it eschewed scripted moments in favor of an A.I.-driven xenomorph that relentlessly stalked your every move around the *Sevastopol* space station. The one-hit-kill encounters could be frustrating, but we wouldn't expect anything less from H.R. Giger's nightmare-inducing monster.

296 AMPLITUDE

PS2 • 2003

Before gamers ever picked up a plastic guitar, Harmonix had players tapping away on controllers in this intense cult hit. Up to four friends could join in at once, hopping back and forth between the instruments of a given song, timing out the complex rhythms as they flowed down the screen. Psychedelic visuals and an escalating difficulty lent the game an absurd replay value, keeping music mixers coming back for another hit of this potent video game hallucinogen.



295 INFAMOUS

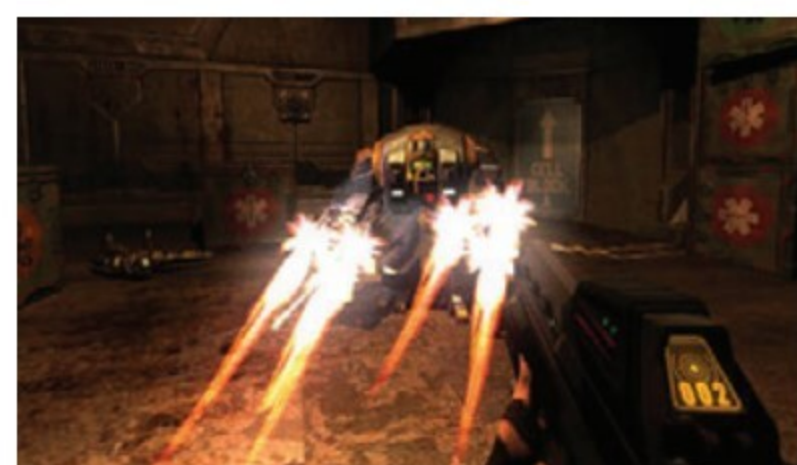
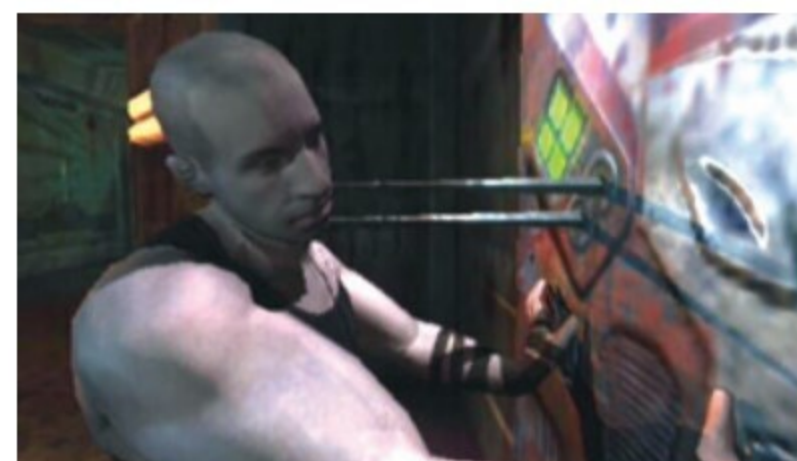
PS3 • 2009

After Sly Cooper's success, developer Sucker Punch opted for a darker direction for its follow-up franchise. Infamous told the story of a superhero discovering his powers and deciding how to use them. For the greater good? Or for personal gain? All of this played out with some of the best open-world platforming and explosive power-tripping abilities of the genre. The sequels expanded the abilities and the world, but the first entry remains our favorite.

294 THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

Xbox • 2004

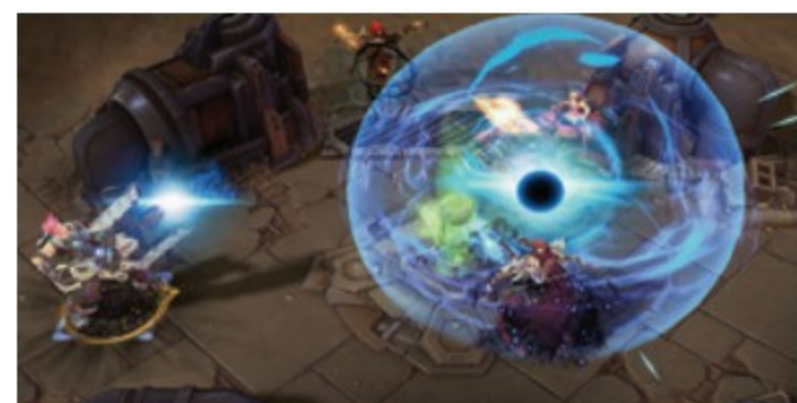
Escape From Butcher Bay successfully combined adventure, shooting, and stealth into one potent mixture. It provided players combat flexibility by offering several interesting options as they shot or snuck their way through enemies. That it also fleshed out the *Pitch Black* universe better than its film counterpart was a nice bonus.



293 MONSTER HUNTER: WORLD

PS4, Xbox One • 2018

The long-running Monster Hunter series has found a dedicated, yet niche audience in the West, but Monster Hunter: World made it a mainstream success. This entry made the jump back to console after being mostly on handhelds for years, and its ambition proved it a hit, heralded as the best Monster Hunter entry to date. World introduced a number of quality-of-life improvements, from smoother controls to a simplified armor system. In addition to a more cinematic experience, Capcom debuted an exciting monster ecosystem that added unpredictability to battles. With returning favorites Rathian and Rathalos alongside creative new monsters such as Tobi-Kadachi and Paolumu, hunting with friends was as delightful as ever. Monster Hunter: World was bigger and better in all the right ways.



292 HEROES OF THE STORM

PC • 2015

With a simplified learning curve and an impressive, colorful cast of Blizzard characters, Heroes of the Storm was a fantastic starting point for the MOBA-curious.



291 MYST

PC • 1993

Though its gorgeous visuals certainly drove CD-ROM sales, the intricate world of Myst and its observation-based puzzles enthralled gamers of all ages.

290 DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION

Arcade • 1999

Dance Dance Revolution's explosion into a full-blown phenomenon had players lining up to show other arcade-goers their moves in this frantic rhythm experience.

289 NHL 09

PS3, 360 • 2008

Despite its smaller budget, NHL outshone its EA Sports brethren with innovations like the 6v6 EASHL and the strong Be A Pro career mode in this era.

288 DUKE NUKEM 3D

PC • 1996

The PC shooter scene blossomed in the mid-'90s, and Duke Nukem 3D was filled to the brim with more personality and inventive weapons than other shooters of the time.

287 SPLINTER CELL: BLACKLIST

PS3, 360, PC • 2013

A brilliant marriage of stealth and action, Blacklist let you play any way you wanted, resulting in one of the deepest and most accessible stealth games.

286 SHADOWRUN RETURNS

PC • 2013

Shadowrun Returns stepped out of its predecessor's shadow to emerge as one of the best modern RPGs thanks to fantastic writing and deep gameplay.

285 DRAGON'S DOGMA

PS3, 360 • 2012

Excellent combat and a cool world made Dragon's Dogma come alive, but the real treat was the innovative pawn system that let players create and share their allies.

284 BASEBALL STARS

NES • 1989

Baseball Stars struck the perfect balance between arcade action and stat-driven simulation, offering memorable teams, editable rosters, and lengthy season play.

283 THE ROOM

iOS • 2012

Fireproof Games' Lovecraftian puzzle game featured inventive adventure elements and made creative use of our mobile device touchscreens like few games have since.



282 WORMS ARMAGEDDON

PC • 1999

Sure, Team 17 may have lifted the Holy Hand Grenade from Monty Python, but the Concrete Donkey, Priceless Ming Vase, and French Sheep Strike are just a few of the countless original weapons that have made the Worms franchise so fun over the years – even when you were accidentally blowing up your own hapless soldiers. Team 17's brilliant mix of turn-based strategy and wacky action has remained steady since the 1995 original, but Worms Armageddon upped the ante with better visuals, more weapons, and a wealth of customization options. Whether you were setting up your own match conditions or picking out the perfect accents for your handcrafted team of aggressive annelids, Worms Armageddon had you covered, setting a new standard for all future entries.



281 RAYMAN LEGENDS

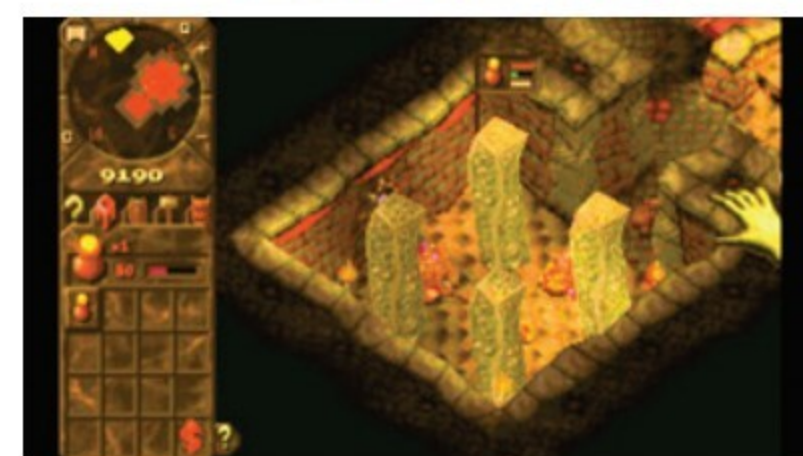
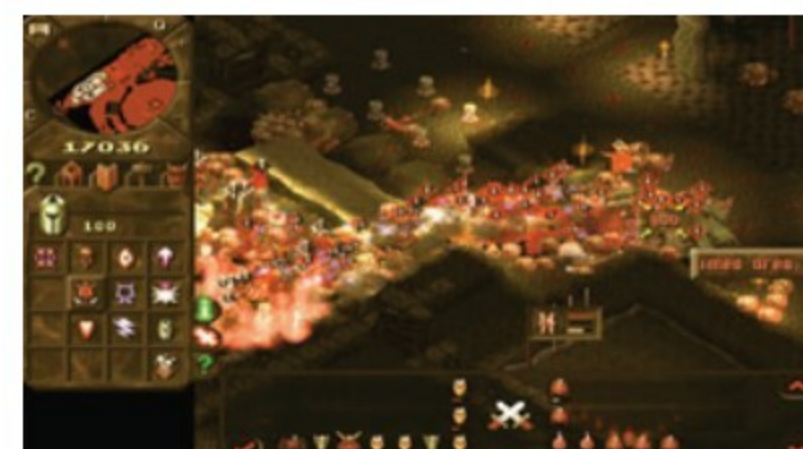
PS3, 360, Wii U, Vita, PC • 2013

Rayman has always been well-liked, but it wasn't until 2011's Rayman Origins that platforming fans began to recognize him as one of the greats. Rayman Legends further cemented that position by being one of the best 2D platformers ever made. It's fast, challenging, exuberant, and the rhythm levels that conclude each world are unlike anything in other platformers. You will never hear "Eye of the Tiger" in the same way. With Legends, Rayman lived up to its subtitle.

280 DUNGEON KEEPER

PC • 1997

Bullfrog excelled at developing games that stubbornly refused to be conventional, and Dungeon Keeper was one of the most creative games in its catalog. An RTS that had you build up armies of darkness to send against the do-gooders invading your underground kingdoms, the game made you delight in sticking it to the forces of good with tricky traps and monsters of the night. This was the wackiest game of the RTS genre.



279 NCAA FOOTBALL 11

PS3, 360 • 2010

Controlling your football program away from your game console was just one of this series' unique features, giving it a distinctive feel from its Madden counterpart.

277 PAPER MARIO

N64 • 2000

With clever mechanics allowing you to switch between 2D and 3D alongside a hilarious script, Paper Mario is a phenomenal RPG that kicked off an excellent series.

275 UNDERTALE

PC • 2015

Undertale's mix of satisfying bullet-hell combat and deeply-nested player consequence made it one of the most thought-provoking and fun indie RPGs we've played.

278 DARKSIDERS

PS3, 360 • 2010

Darksiders wore its Zelda inspiration on its sleeve, but provided compelling art from comic book artist Joe Madureira with an interesting, expansive world.

276 NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT

PS3, 360 • 2010

When Criterion Games resurrected the Hot Pursuit label, we knew it'd be a rush. This perfect blend of "cops-and-robbers" chases felt like pure adrenaline.

274 SAINTS ROW: THE THIRD

PS3, 360, PC • 2011

After facing criticisms of being a Grand Theft Auto clone, the Saints Row series forged its own identity by embracing its most absurd elements.



273 STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT II

PS2, Xbox, PSP, PC • 2005

Not to be confused with 2017's micro-transaction-laden fiasco, LucasArts' Star Wars: Battlefront II was an outstanding multiplayer title that let you fight during the two cinematic Star Wars eras that existed at the time. Putting you in control of a typical foot-soldier, Battlefront II provided the ultimate Star Wars fantasy of taking part in large-scale battles across iconic locations. The feeling of being "just another soldier" subsided the moment you took over as one of the legendary heroes from the Star Wars universe. Slashing down lowly rebels as Darth Vader or cleaning up the droid congestion as Obi-Wan never got old. In addition to a robust multiplayer suite, Battlefront II included an improved campaign that provided objective-based missions to keep players busy offline.



272 RIDGE RACER

PS1 • 1995

Although Ridge Racer debuted in arcades, it made its mark as a PlayStation launch title, with precision-based drifting, challenging A.I., and colorful 3D graphics.



271 THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU

DS • 2008

TWEWY's fun characters and dialogue, chaotic-but-manageable combat system, and fresh take on a classic end-of-the-world plot made it a unique and stylish RPG.



270 SSX 3

PS2, Xbox, GameCube • 2003

The third entry in EA's snowboard stunt racer nailed the landing. This brilliant blend of gravity-defying tricks and high-stakes racing remains fun today.



269 CASTLE CRASHERS

360 • 2008

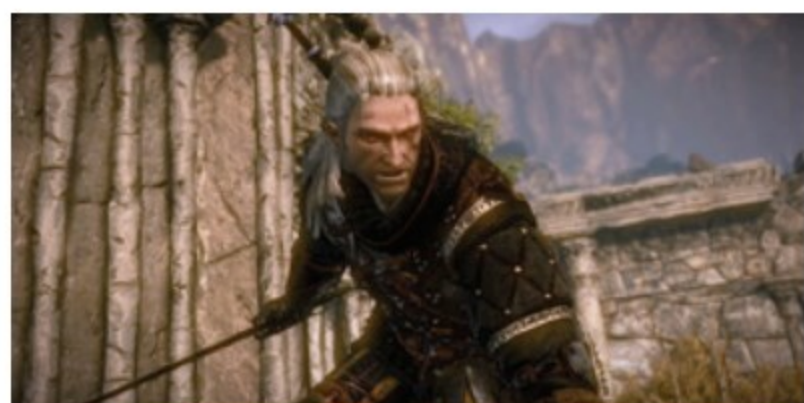
Accessible action, goofy humor, and chaotic co-op made Castle Crashers an early hit on Xbox Live Arcade – and tons of unlockable characters upped the replay value.



268 PYRE

PS4, PC, Mac • 2017

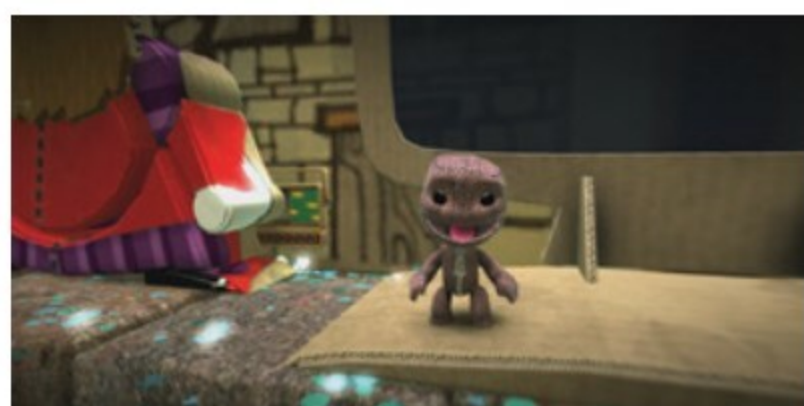
Immaculate fantasy world-building somehow slotted together with classic arcade sports in this excellent indie role-playing tale of lost souls and redemption.



267 THE WITCHER 2: ASSASSINS OF KINGS

PC • 2011

Few games featured as far-reaching consequences for a single decision as The Witcher 2's choice between Roche and Iorveth.



266 LITTLEBIGPLANET

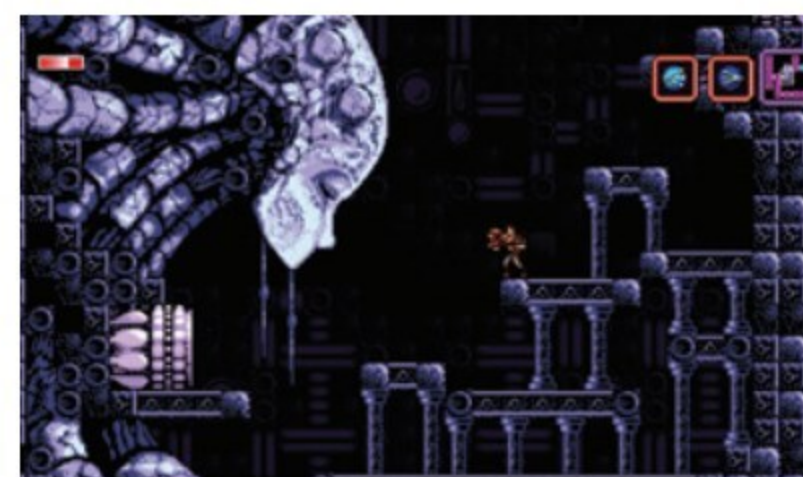
PS3 • 2008

Media Molecule didn't invent games about making games, but LittleBigPlanet is our favorite execution of the idea thanks to great art direction and fun-to-use tools.

265 FATAL FRAME II: CRIMSON BUTTERFLY

PS2 • 2003

The Fatal Frame series is known for its creepiness, but the second game earned the crown as the most memorable. Exploring an eerie town as sisters Mio and Mayu while learning the horrors of the "Crimson Sacrifice Ritual" kept you on the edge of your seat. And you couldn't look away as you had to confront apparitions head on by taking photos to damage them. It remains one of the scariest games of all time.



264 AXIOM VERGE

PS4 • 2015

Metroid-inspired adventures are a dime a dozen in the indie space, but Thomas Happ single-handedly created one of the most beautiful tributes to Nintendo's sci-fi classic. After a scientist's experiment goes awry, he wakes up in an alien-future and must assemble an arsenal of exotic weapons to overcome several environmental puzzles and combat encounters. Axiom Verge wasn't just a tribute, it's a modern classic that stands on its own.

263 HARVEST MOON

SNES • 1996

Who would have thought a game about the routine life of a farmer could be so captivating? When this relaxing simulation game launched, there really wasn't much like it on the market. It provided an engaging and comfortable loop of managing your day-to-day life of farming, which consisted of planting crops, taking care of livestock, and learning more about the locals. As one of the earlier games with dating sim elements, it allowed you to woo the bachelorette of your choice. You weren't just building a farm, you were building a life from the ground up, making your crops thrive, and creating a family. The series is still around today, bolstering its core mechanics, from romances to livestock choices. Its impact on the genre can't be denied, providing a solid template for later games like Stardew Valley.





262 WARIOWARE, INC.: MEGA MICROGAMES!

GBA • 2003

WarioWare is an eclectic mix of dozens of micro games played at breakneck speed, and they all managed to be engaging and fun.



261 SHOVEL KNIGHT

Wii U, 3DS, PC • 2014

Though paying homage to the NES era is common with indies, Shovel Knight nonetheless stood out with its brilliant platforming and clever risk-reward system.

260 SKIES OF ARCADIA

Dreamcast • 2000

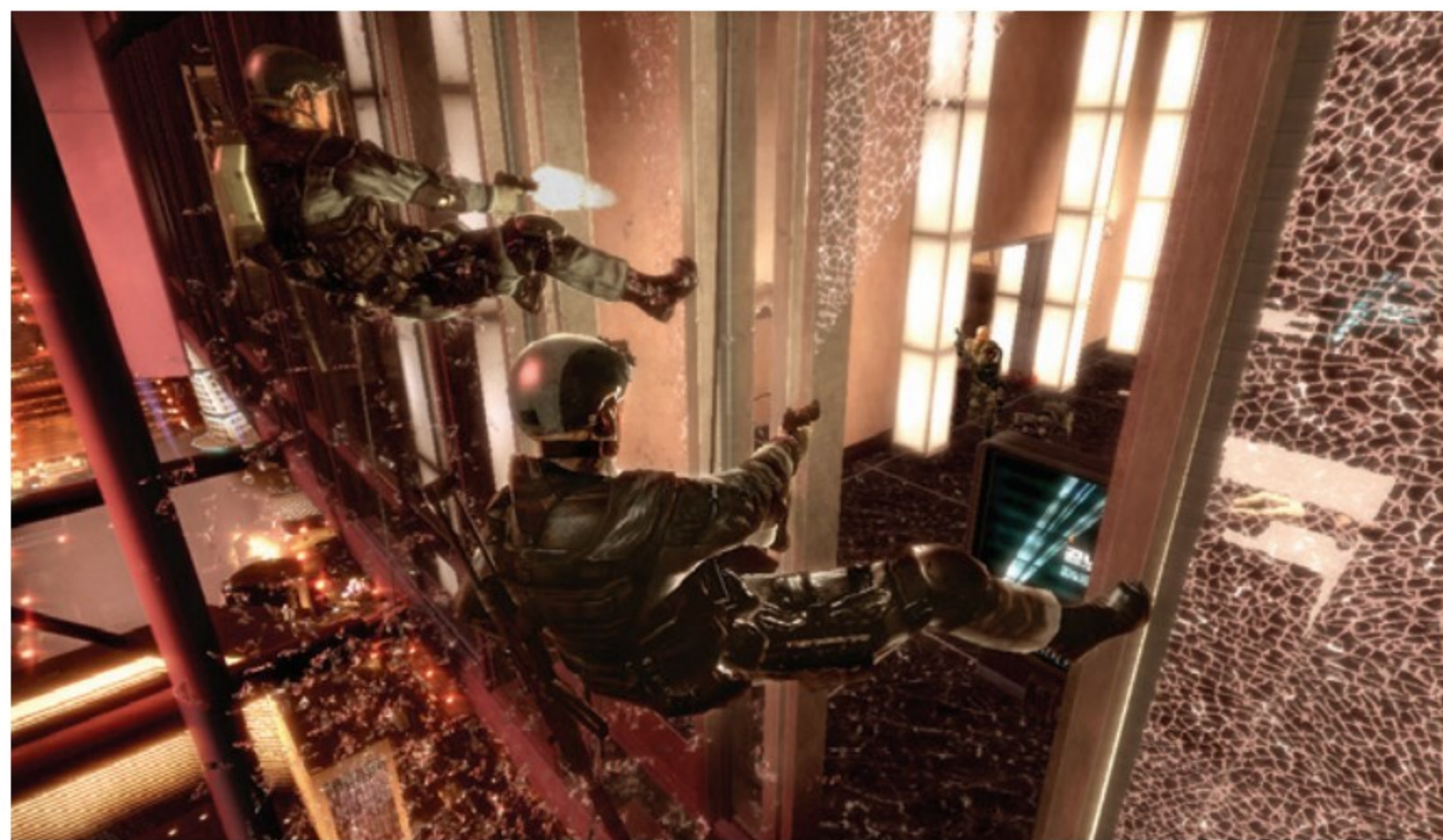
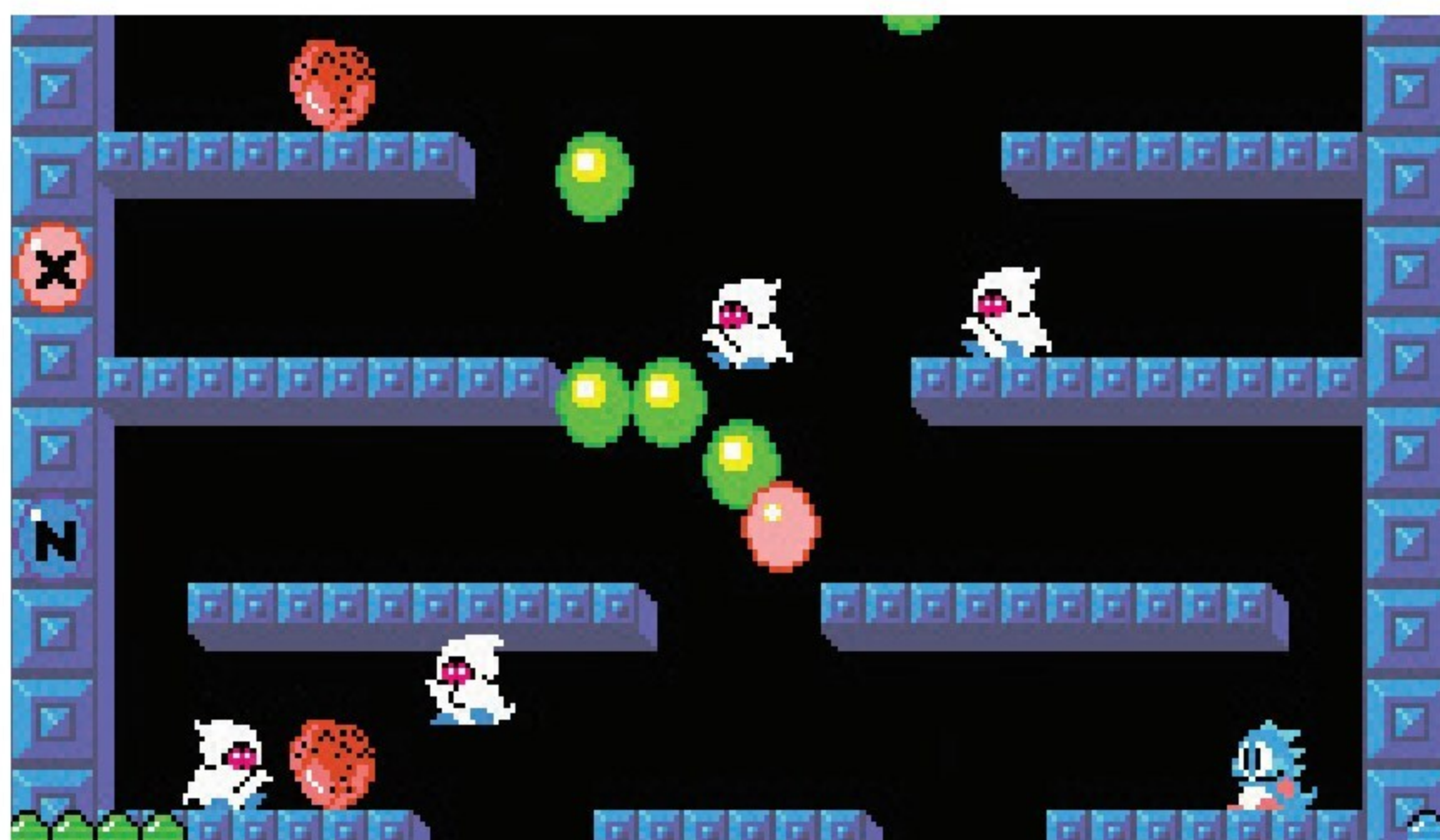
Skies of Arcadia may be one of the lesser-known RPGs on this list, but it soared high in regards to exploration and just being flat-out fun. Do-gooder protagonist Vyse was much like an updated Robin Hood, only as a sky pirate. The sense of discovery was palpable when flying your airship in 3D as you could stumble on hidden locations and recruit people to work on your ship. This pirate tale was ahead of its time.



259 BUBBLE BOBBLE

Arcade • 1986

We're not sure why the dragon duo Bub and Bob were so proficient at blowing bubbles, but we still have a soft spot in our hearts for Taito's classic platformer. Your ability to trap monsters and bounce to higher platforms on your floating projectiles gave the gameplay its own dino-sized footprint unlike any other game. Bubble Bobble was built for co-op, challenging players to a collection of 100 increasingly intricate stages that each required its own unique approach. However, playing with a friend was still surprisingly competitive, as you raced to entrap monsters and scoop up collectibles first. If you never played Bubble Bobble, we're happy to report the game is just as fun today as it was in 1986. Just be prepared to have the catchy theme song stuck in your head for the next 30 years.



258 RAINBOW SIX VEGAS

PS3, 360, PC • 2006

Rainbow Six took a considerable step forward when its special operatives rappelled into Sin City. Ubisoft Montreal streamlined the deep, sometimes overwhelming tactical options from previous games into simple button-press commands, and the third-person cover system widened your viewing angle to offer an extra tactical reason for ducking behind slot machines. These changes made for a better experience, but the true reason we look back fondly on this landmark Rainbow Six title was its amazing multiplayer suite. The entire campaign was playable with four players online, and the addictive terrorist hunts kept us coming back to the fantastic casino environments. Vegas also had a deep competitive multiplayer suite packed with player progression, unlocks, clan tags, and facial scanning.



257 TOMB RAIDER

PS3, 360, PC • 2013

After a few years off, Crystal Dynamics brought the iconic Lara Croft back to the spotlight with a grittier, more personal adventure. The reboot focused on a younger Croft, less confident and discovering the world's harshness. The game had all the elements of a great adventure: daredevil stunts, high-stakes battles, and tragic moments. But most importantly, it reinvented Lara Croft for a new generation of players in both her characterization and gameplay prowess.

256 SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: PERSONA 3

PS2 • 2005

Persona 3 established the winning high school sim and dungeon crawling formulas future entries in this RPG series would build on, but developer Atlus did a fantastic job on the first go-round. The many after-school activities and endearing cast of characters acted as an engaging counterbalance to the tall task of climbing Tartarus and brooding main plot, which left its mark on anyone who made it to the end of the calendar year.



255 COMPANY OF HEROES

PC • 2006

Stepping away from its traditional sci-fi trappings, Relic Entertainment made one of the last great real-time strategy games in Company of Heroes. A far cry from Homeworld and Dawn of War, the title injected a much-needed intensity into the stagnating military RTS scene. Starting with storming the beaches of Normandy and extending into the heart of Germany, the campaign challenged players with controlling supply lines while guiding infantry, tank divisions, and air assets to victory. Nearly every building or wall could be used as cover, adding more tactical considerations to the environment, and the context-savvy soldier chatter always let you know when a unit was in danger of being overwhelmed. Even though it's a decade old, Company of Heroes design was so well realized it's still fun to play today.

254 PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY – TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

DS • 2007

Phoenix's pun-filled courtroom adventure provided the best twists and turns while taking advantage of the DS's touchscreen.

253 MISSILE COMMAND

Arcade • 1980

Cold War fears inspired an arcade classic. Players were tasked with protecting American cities by spinning a trackball to knock nukes out of the sky.

252 NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

PC • 2002

BioWare continued its string of excellent RPG campaigns, but it was the flexible modding and creation tools that gave digital dungeon masters years of adventures.

251 ALPHA CENTAURI

PC • 1999

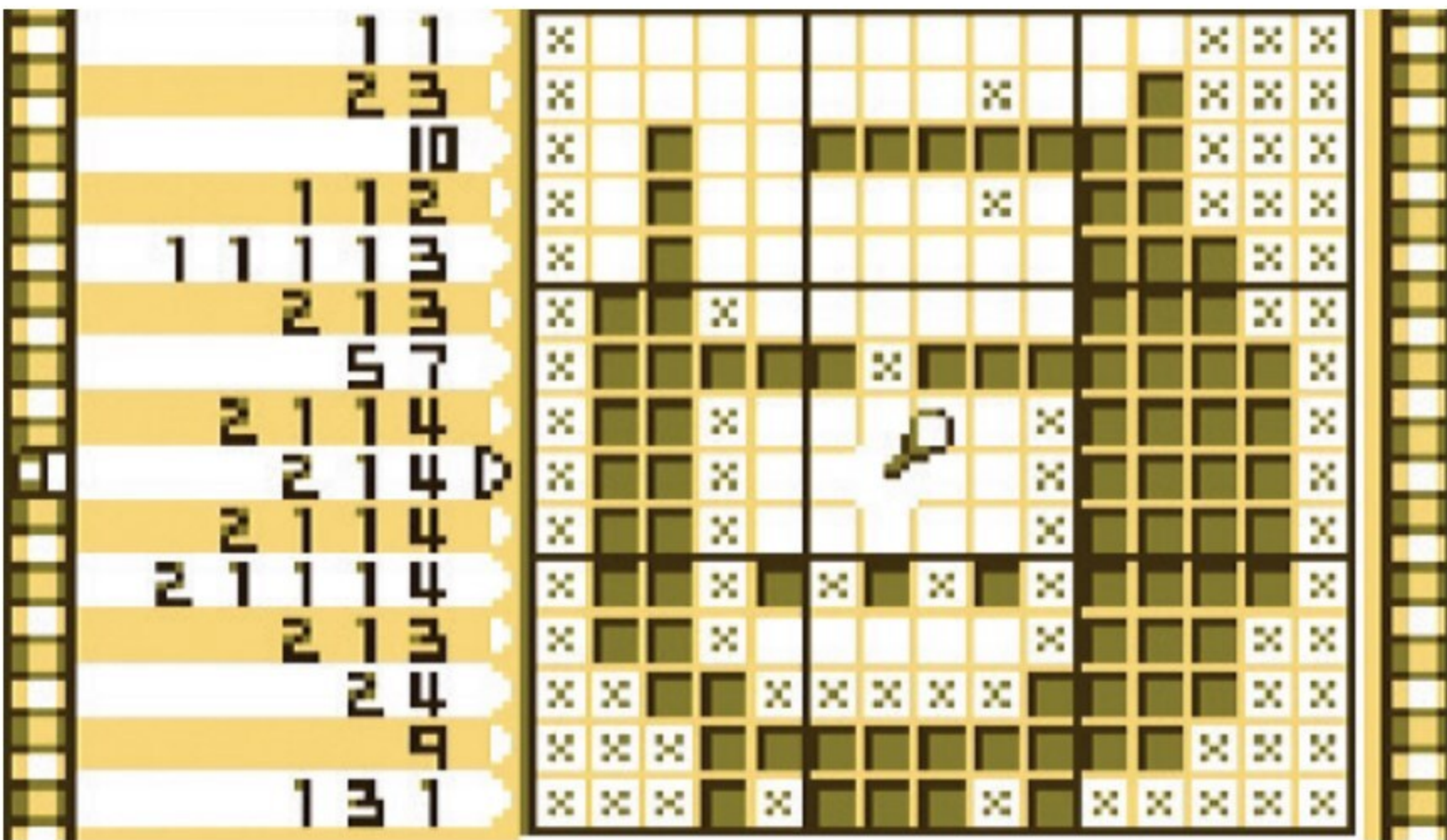
Sid Meier's sci-fi Civ spin-off leaned more into story than most 4X games, which proved a great complement to its strong unit customization and deep tech trees.



250 **LIMBO**

360 • 2010

Alongside titles like Braid, Limbo proved small downloadable games could be every bit as compelling as ones privileged enough to be printed on a disc. Limbo kept its mechanics simple in order to highlight its setting and excellent puzzle design. It established developer Playdead’s modus operandi and compelling point of view. Its mysterious world, dark tone, and unexpected violence made it an experience that stuck with you long after you saw the credits.



248 **MARIO’S PICROSS**

Game Boy • 1995

Nintendo may not have invented the nonogram puzzle, but Mario’s Picross is what made it mainstream. Millions of gamers were introduced and consequently enthralled with the deductive gameplay of this chisel-by-numbers puzzler. Nowadays, there’s no shortage of knockoff Picross apps on the mobile scene, but it’s worth appreciating the complete experience Mario’s Picross offered; the archeology theme fit with the slow and calculated deductions, and the chisel animations made each correct guess feel supremely satisfying, and each mistake feel equally disastrous. Mario’s Picross has spawned an endless line of sequels over the years, including an exceptional 3D spin-off series, but our official accolades go out to the originator that transformed a pen-and-paper picture puzzle into a video game sensation.

249 **PAC-MAN CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION**

360 • 2007

Reinventing one of the most iconic arcade games of all time is a tall order, but that’s exactly what Namco Bandai did when it released Championship Edition. Thrilling speed and endless score-chasing potential helped Pac-Man feel fresh again. Immaculate timing and stellar level design hit the mark, and thumping beats combined with classic sound effects for the perfect blend of nostalgia and newness.



247 **TEKKEN 3**

Arcade • 1997

Tekken 3 was the first time the fighting series’ 3D arenas mattered, fulfilling the promise of the over-the-top combat and making it a real contender in the genre.

246 **VALKYRIE PROFILE**

PS1 • 2000

A bittersweet tone colored this complex RPG based on Norse mythology, with the goddess Lenneth recruiting recently deceased souls to be soldiers in a heavenly war.

245 **SPACE INVADERS**

Arcade • 1978

We’ll never exactly know what the invaders were (Crabs? Robots?), but the shooter’s appeal was clear. Decades later, the inevitable alien crush is a heart-racing thrill.

244 **THE WITNESS**

PS4 • 2016

How many ways can you draw a line between two points? If your name is Jonathan Blow, the answer is hundreds, each more captivating and complex than the last.

243 ULTIMA IV: QUEST OF THE AVATAR

PC • 1985

Long before open-world RPGs hit the big time, computer players thrilled at the world of Britannia, filled with monsters, townspeople, and a quest for true virtue.

242 DAY OF THE TENTACLE

PC • 1993

With a quirky cast, brain-teasingly fun puzzles, and time-travel antics, this sequel to Maniac Mansion was a joy to play and one of LucasArts' best adventure games.

241 COMBAT

Atari 2600 • 1977

Combat was an excellent pack-in title for the system, boasting 27 game modes and giving 2600 owners a ready-made multiplayer classic.

240 MORTAL KOMBAT X

PS4, Xbox One, PC • 2015

Mortal Kombat X refined the series' combat to a blood-soaked edge and set a high bar for how much a fighter could let players do without battling another human.

239 SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND

SNES • 1995

Super Mario World's follow-up successfully tried something unique by placing Baby Mario in Yoshi's care.

238 DOUBLE DRAGON

Arcade • 1987

Billy and Jimmy Lee punched their way to arcade success in an enjoyable side-scrolling beat-'em-up that favored cooperative play.

237 TACTICS OGRE

PS1 • 1998

A fantastic isometric tactics game, Tactics Ogre pushed the strategy genre forward with its epic ambitions and nonlinear narrative paths.

236 TITANFALL 2

PS4, Xbox One, PC • 2017

Titanfall 2 wisely built upon the robot-punching foundation of its predecessor to create an unbelievable campaign filled with parkour and a hell of a lot of bullets.



235 FAR CRY 3

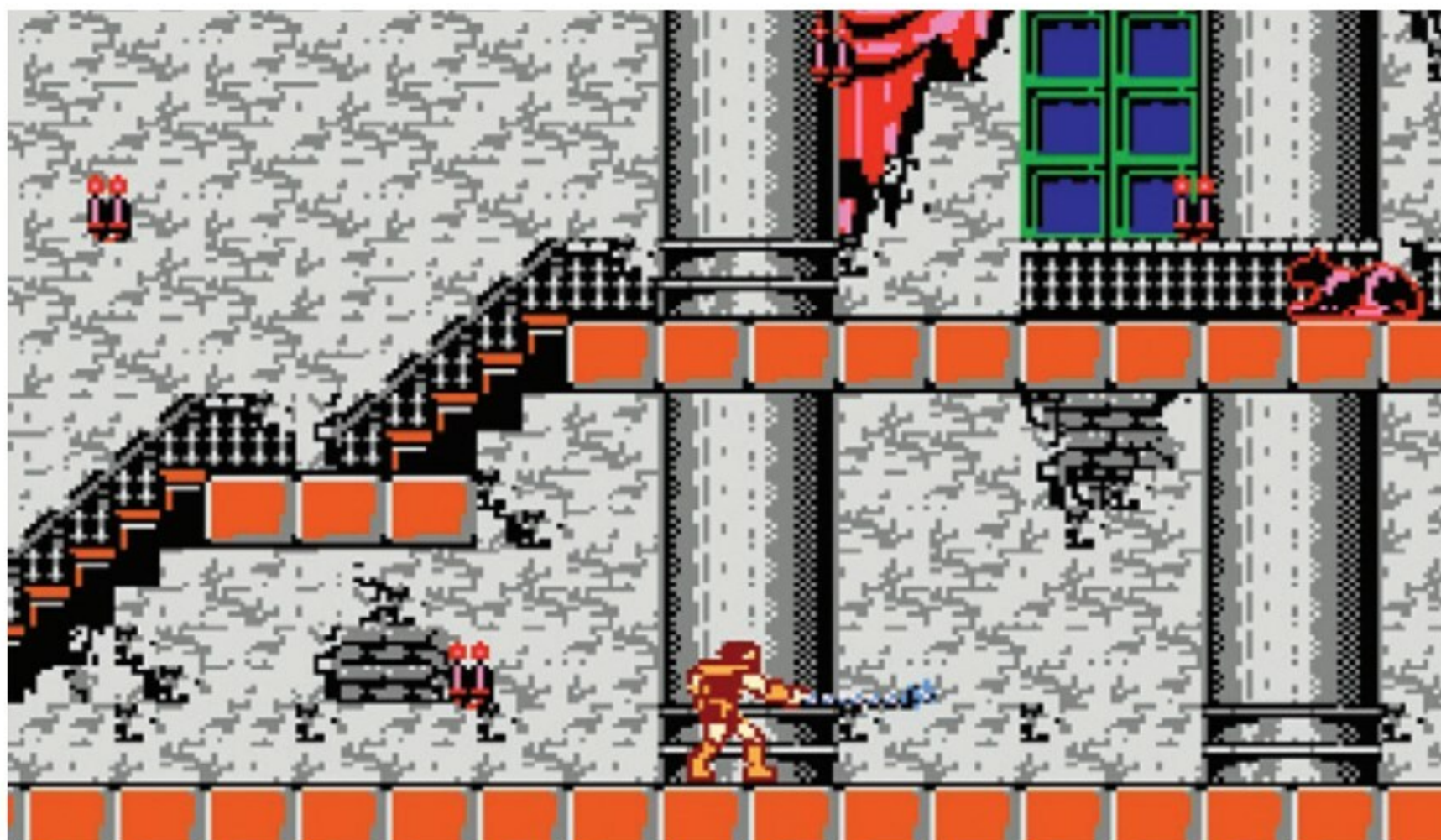
PS3, 360, PC • 2012

The Far Cry series has always transported us to interesting, remote locations, but Far Cry 3 was the first to smooth out the rough edges and create a cohesive open world filled with interesting things to do. The ability to reclaim territories to halt infinite spawning enemies and a more forgiving checkpoint system resolved the frustrating elements of the otherwise remarkable Far Cry 2. The addition of myriad side activities made sure the player was never lacking in direction. Hunting vibrant and deadly wildlife (watch out for the Komodo dragons!) for crafting materials was our favorite task, encouraging us to explore the rich and varied South Pacific island locale. The free-form mission designs also preserved player creativity, allowing you to find inventive solutions to taking down Vaas' pirate posse.

234 CASTLEVANIA

NES • 1987

Symphony of the Night may be our favorite Castlevania game, but that doesn't take anything away from Simon Belmont's first whip-cracking adventure. The gothic setting and ghoulish enemy design offered gamers a more serious tone than they were accustomed to, while the side-scrolling combat ushered in a new standard for action gameplay. Upgrading the power and length of Belmont's whip felt revolutionary at the time, as did his heart-consuming sub-weapons that could stop time or clear an entire screen of enemies. Players needed all the help they could get, too, as making it to Dracula's lair took real skill, and besting the Count earned you serious bragging rights. Castlevania has changed and evolved into a whole different beast over the decades, but like Dracula himself, its power lies in its ancestry.



233 ORI AND THE BLIND FOREST

Xbox One, PC • 2015

Moon Studios' pixel-perfect platforming and Metroid-inspired exploration came wrapped in a stunning visual design and a heartbreaking story we'll never forget.

231 FIRE EMBLEM AWAKENING

3DS • 2013

Awakening rescued the series from obscurity. The relationship system put a twist on characters and battle, while more difficulty options increased its appeal.

229 WHAT REMAINS OF EDITH FINCH

PS4, Xbox One, PC • 2017

This adventure, where players explored a home and learned about ancestors through uniquely crafted short stories, raised the bar for storytelling in indie games.

232 DARKEST DUNGEON

PC, Mac • 2016

Lovecraftian horror met party-driven turn-based fantasy combat in this brilliant, dark twist on dungeon crawling; insanity lurked just beyond the torchlight.

230 DEAD RISING 2

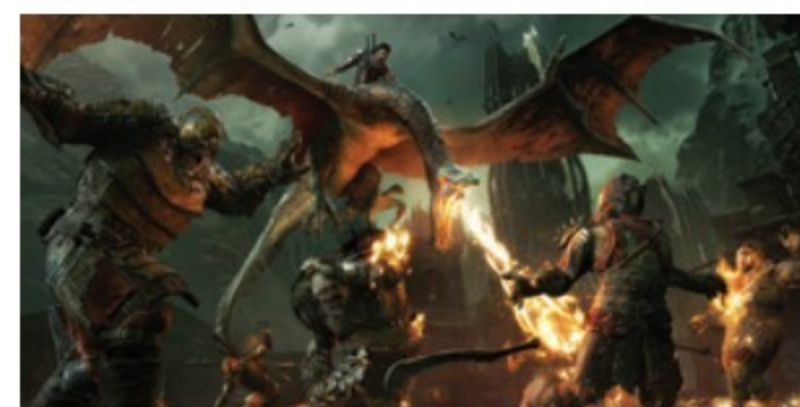
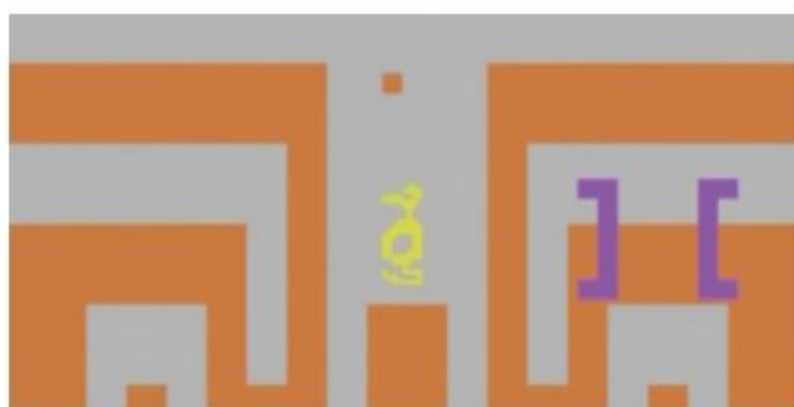
PS3, 360, PC • 2010

Chuck Greene's ingenuity had lasting effects on the series. Thanks to his crafting abilities, bizarre hybrid weapons are as important to Dead Rising as the zombies.

228 DEFENDER

Arcade • 1981

Defender and its frantic gameplay were a hallmark of the era, expanding the horizons of games like Asteroids with multiple objectives, a mini-map, and vivid colors.



227 PANZER DRAGON SAGA

Saturn • 1998

Sega's on-rails shooter added a rich active-time combat system and dragon evolutions to create one of the most unique (and expensive) RPGs we've ever played.

226 ADVENTURE

Atari 2600 • 1979

Adventure's simple graphics encouraged our imaginations with its world of dragons, mazes, dastardly key-stealing bats, and secrets we explored over and over.

225 MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF WAR

PS4, Xbox One, PC • 2017

The vaunted procedural Nemesis system hit full stride in this sequel, offering endless fleshed out foes to fight using a stellar counter-based combat system.



224 SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY

Switch • 2017

Super Mario Odyssey took the series' pedigree of platforming excellence and expanded it in exciting new directions. Giving Mario the ability to "capture" enemies by throwing his hat at them opened myriad gameplay options and allowed for new approaches to the game's many challenges. The open structure harkened back to the joyful playground feeling of Super Mario 64, and its exciting nods to Mario's past made Odyssey a thrilling delight from start to finish.

223 PEGGLE

PC • 2007

PopCap's pachinko-inspired gem initially seemed too simple. First-time players had fun watching their balls ping-pong across a field of colorful pegs until they cleared the board in a crescendo of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." However, as we spent more time with this unique puzzle game, we realized its candy-coated visuals and simple mechanics hid a deeper strategy, and eventually we found ourselves lining up carefully-timed shots like a billiards master.



222 MAX PAYNE

PC • 2001

Max Payne was an early example of story being placed at the forefront of a 3D action game and the origin of the oft-copied, but still special, bullet-time.

220 VALKYRIA CHRONICLES

PS3 • 2008

Beautiful anime-stylized art and innovative grid-less tactical play made this story-centric strategic military campaign a joy from beginning to end.

218 BAYONETTA

PS3, 360 • 2009

Bayonetta took stylish spectacle to new heights with its over-the-top combos. The story was fluffy, but the incredible combat depth satisfied serious action fans.

221 FABLE II

360 • 2008

Fable II was one of the Xbox 360's best RPGs, offering great combat and an engaging morality system that let players choose what kind of hero they wanted to be.

219 PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES

PC • 2009

PopCap's brilliant spin on tower defense gave players an arsenal of deadly plants and asked them to defend their yard from hordes of traffic cone-wearing zombies.

217 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Genesis • 1991

In a Mario-dominated industry, Sonic's ample attitude and blistering sense of speed gave Sega the first viable challenger to Nintendo's juggernaut.



216 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK'S AWAKENING

Game Boy • 1993

Link's Awakening started as a planned port of the SNES classic A Link to the Past, but became something else entirely once development truly began. Many of Zelda's core mechanics translated well to the handheld platform. However, Link's Awakening's legacy is that it is one of the stranger entries in Nintendo's revered franchise. The bizarre nature of the townspeople and world (there is a working telephone in the game) lent it a dreamlike tone, and Nintendo somehow managed to shrink Zelda to a smaller screen without reducing the scope. Director Takashi Tezuka referenced *Twin Peaks* as an inspiration for Koholint Island's strange cast of characters, and it also had callouts to other Nintendo games and characters like Kirby, Yoshi, and Mario – a rare occurrence in the Zelda franchise.



215 SHINING FORCE II

Genesis • 1993

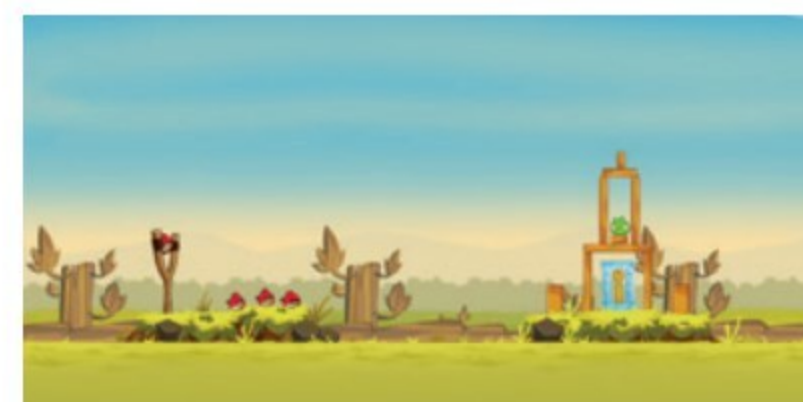
Freedom in progression and exploring a more open world to find new allies made it a herald of the current fantasy strategy RPG.



214 KING'S QUEST VI: HEIR TODAY, GONE TOMORROW

PC • 1992

With clever puzzles that never got too obtuse, this installment was the high point in Sierra's popular King's Quest series.



213 ANGRY BIRDS

iOS • 2009

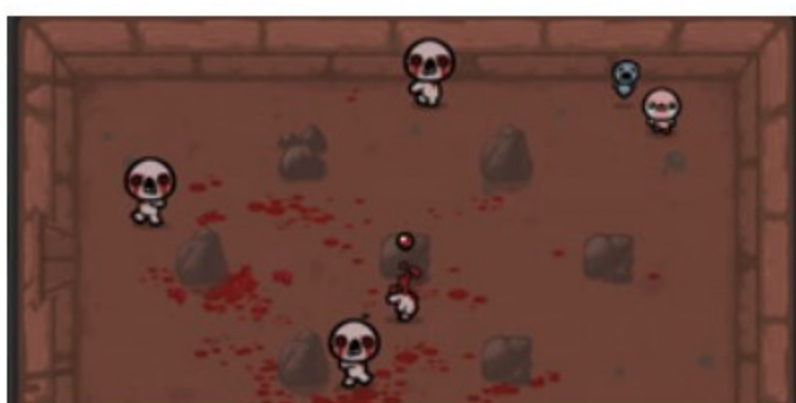
The hardcore gamer may scoff at Angry Birds' casual audience, but there is destructive fun in its simplicity, and there is no denying its continued cultural impact.



212 PITFALL!

Atari 2600 • 1982

More than a side-scroller, Pitfall's encouragement of level exploration in the face of scorpions, alligators, and quicksand made getting those gold bars worth it.



211 THE BINDING OF ISAAC

PC • 2011

Thanks to its grotesque bosses, game-changing power-ups, and procedurally generated levels, Edmund McMillen's roguelike take on The Legend of Zelda never got old.

209 HOT SHOTS GOLF FORE!

PS2 • 2004

This series' three-click swing was a landmark for video game golf gameplay, and Fore! was its heyday. The simple gameplay was augmented by custom gear and different shot types, and punctuated by a cast of quirky opponents over increasingly challenging courses. Video game golf has advanced to the arguably more representative analog swing, but to some this was the best way to golf.



210 RAINBOW SIX SIEGE

PS4, Xbox One, PC • 2015

When we first reviewed Rainbow Six Siege, the 5v5 competitive shooter had many shortcomings. But over time, Ubisoft Montreal fixed the questionable hit detection, refined the match-making, and dramatically increased the number of maps, operators, and unlockable cosmetic skins. The extra work has paid off.

More than two years past its debut, Siege's core attack-and-defend paradigm hasn't lost any of its luster. Each playable character brings a unique ability to the table, offering a wide variety of combinatorial options for calculated rushes or strategic fortifications. Destructible environments and unsafe defense locations that have at least one weakness give each frantic match another layer of tactical stress, offering an addictive thrill that has entertained more than 25 million players to date.



208 SHADOWRUN

SNES • 1993

Real-time action with a tabletop feel made this classic a truly unique entry for the time. Meshing a film-noir mystery with cyberpunk weapons and body modifications and even cyberspace hacking, Shadowrun combined RPG aspects with an open, compelling story. Futuristic elements merged with fantasy as shamans, magic, vampires and more created a surprisingly believable and immersive world. Shadowrun used an advanced dialogue system for the time, providing players the feeling of true investigation by tracking down and using special keywords in conversations to suss out details and progress the story. Mature and gritty, Shadowrun deftly separated itself from traditional turn-based RPGs of the era.



207 CALL OF DUTY

PC • 2003

The premiere entry of the most profitable first-person shooter series, the original Call of Duty might seem less impressive now when compared to the achievements of its various successors, but this is where Activision's massive, annual-sequel-driven empire began. And it's still an impressive title after all of this time, too. The campaign's emphasis on squad gameplay and narrative jumps between nations helped capture the international sprawl of World War II in a way that the genre hadn't before. The bombastic action sequences would come to define the series originated here, with a D-Day airdrop infiltration and a car chase scene serving as heart-pounding standouts.



206 JAK & DAXTER: THE PRECURSOR LEGACY

PS2 • 2001

Following the success of the Crash Bandicoot trilogy, Naughty Dog set its sights on a more ambitious platforming adventure. Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy wove storytelling and non-linear quests into a large world where players leapt, spun, and fought their way to rewarding discoveries. The action and sense of discovery stole the show, but Daxter also worked his way into our hearts with his comedic musings.

205 RATCHET & CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL

PS2 • 2004

The early adventures of Insomniac's lovable Lombax and his tin-can companion featured great platforming and dozens of bizarre weapons, but Ratchet & Clank hit its stride with Up Your Arsenal. A variety of exotic worlds were more fun to explore thanks to a deeper leveling system and an alien ordnance that included plasma whips, razor-teethed robot minions, and a raygun that turned enemies into bomb-laying ducks.



204 THE STANLEY PARABLE

PC • 2013

Whether you love or hate the so-called "walking simulator" genre, you're missing out if you haven't experienced The Stanley Parable. Simply put, no other game in the narrative-focused genre is as clever, creative, and downright surprising as Galactic Café's debut title. That's no accident; as you lead the titular Stanley through an endless loop of mundane, game-resetting choices, The Stanley Parable continuously defies all the gameplay and storytelling conventions you've come to expect. The Stanley Parable boldly delved into philosophical questions about the nature of choice, and yet it was never pretentious – in fact, thanks to Davey Wreden's hilarious writing and the wry, omniscient narration of Kevan Brighting, the game was as funny as it was thought-provoking.



203 PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC • 2003

Sands of Time established a trilogy and revitalized the Prince of Persia franchise in a huge way. Its original creator, Jordan Mechner, returned for this entry, helping take the series to new places, especially in its approach to platforming. Moving through environments was a test of acrobatic puzzle solving instead of accurate jumping, and the new ability to rewind time made mistakes more forgivable and looked awesome.

202 MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 2: NEW AGE OF HEROES

Dreamcast • 2000

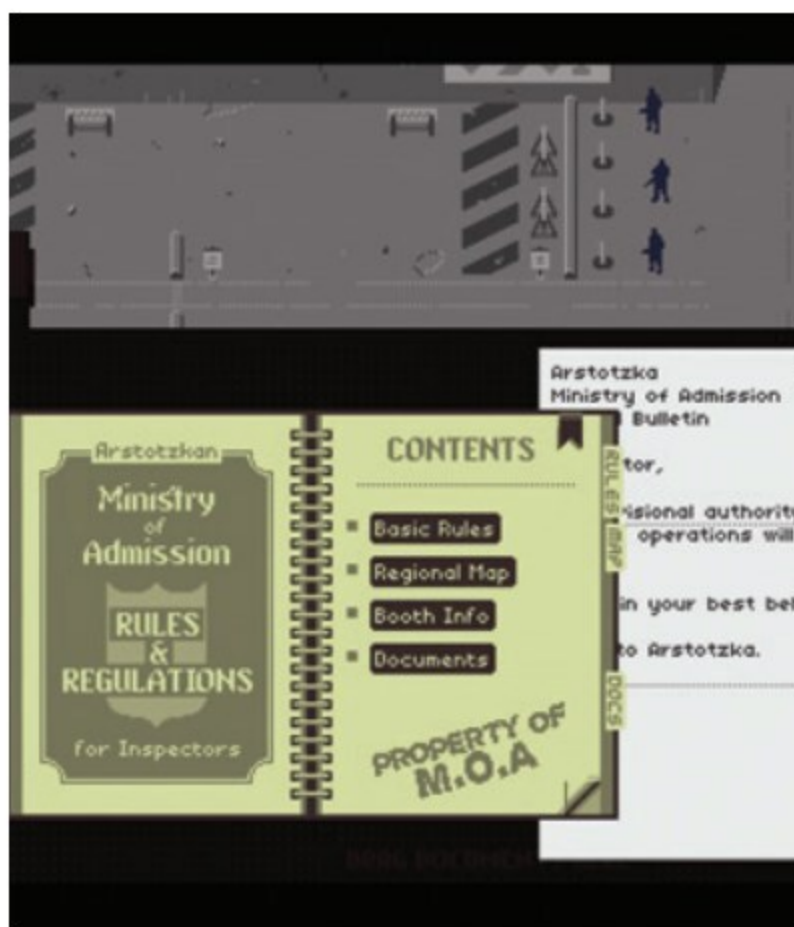
Marvel vs. Capcom 2 set the American fighting game scene ablaze. Its massive roster featured mainstays and cult picks from every corner of the Marvel and Capcom universes, letting plenty of players in on its wacky fun. Over the years, its outlandish three-on-three fighting proved to be worth its salt as team synergy was as vital to victory as character mastery. It's still the template for most team-based fighters today.



201 PHANTASY STAR IV: THE END OF THE MILLENNIUM

Genesis • 1995

Sega was ahead of its time when it unleashed Chaz and his cohorts on the Genesis. The traditional, science-fiction RPG had trappings that wouldn't be out of place today: cinematic sequences that played out with comic-like stills, varied combat tactics featuring combination attacks and vehicles, and an epic story with a huge cast. The twists, turns, and scale of the journey were impressive then and remain fresh today.



200 PAPERS, PLEASE

PC, Mac • 2013

Choice is a buzzword for video games, but few have tested our beliefs as this game by Lucas Pope. It casted you as a border guard for an oppressive regime trying to do the job of quickly checking immigrants' documents to keep out terrorists and law-breakers. In doing so, however, you also had to make moral decisions on issues like privacy, corruption, and bigotry. There were no right answers, which made the game so fascinating.

199 SILENT HILL 2

PS2 • 2001

Fog, manifestations, and ambiance have all been Silent Hill's calling cards. Silent Hill 2 took things to a new level with James Sutherland's intense tale, which placed him in an eerie town to discover more about a letter he received from his deceased wife. The claustrophobic environments, facing Pyramid Head for the first time, and clever storytelling all made the psychological experience shine, while the twisted multiple endings left you blindsided in the best way.





198 MARBLE MADNESS

Arcade • 1984

Mark Cerny's oddball creation had one of the most clever designs seen in arcades. Players rolled their marbles through whimsical mazes using a trackball, effectively duplicating the same motion in real life as on the screen – a novelty in its day. The addition of another player created a tense dynamic, as the spheres dashed and bashed each other into oblivion. Adequate home ports of the game followed, but to get the true experience, you must play the original.



196 STAR WARS JEDI KNIGHT: DARK FORCES II

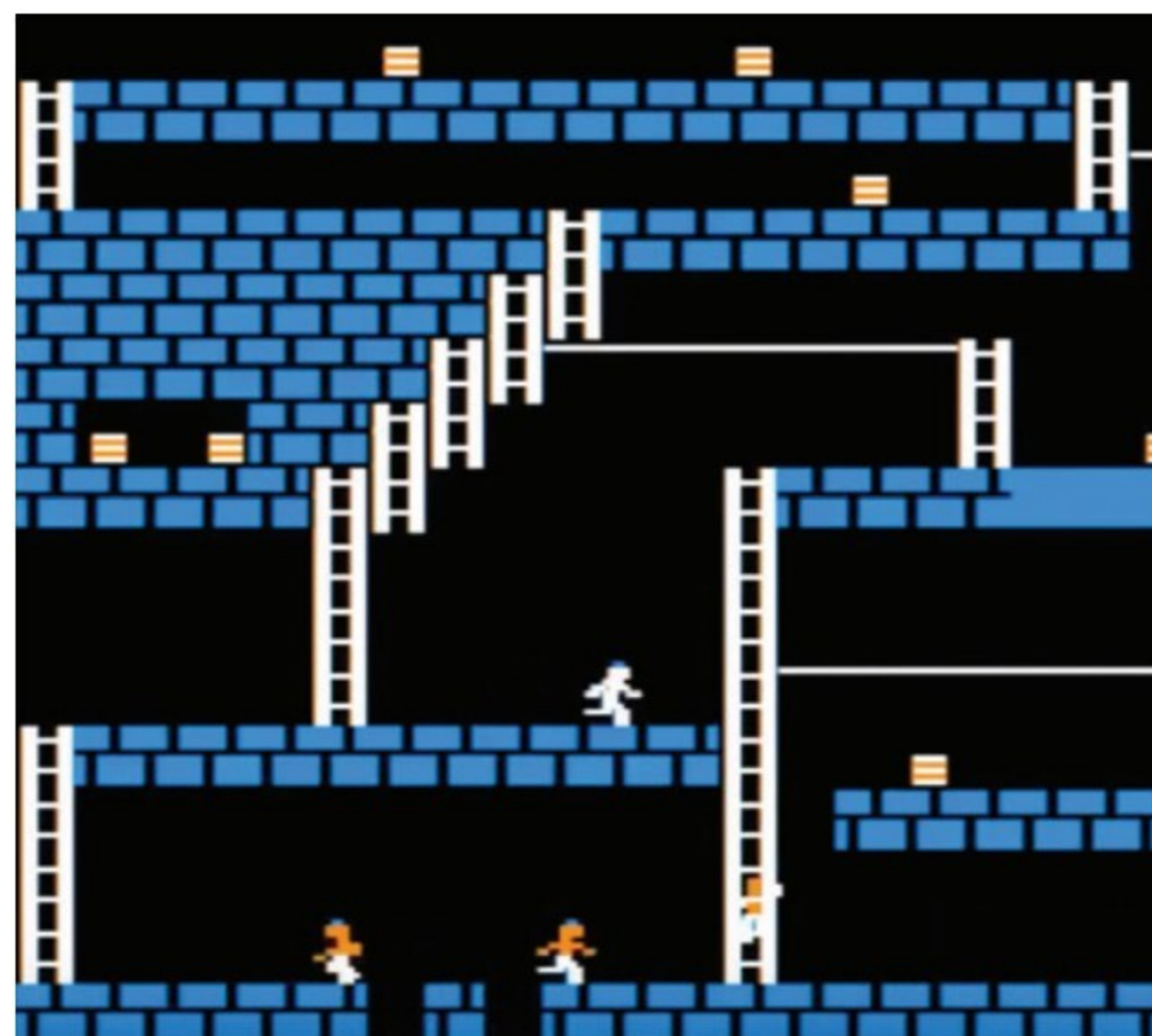
PC • 1997

Few sequels changed the script on players as much as Dark Forces II did. After three excellently crafted levels of first-person shooter action, protagonist Kyle Katarn showed us he was just as skilled with a lightsaber as he was a stormtrooper blaster. From this point on, Dark Forces II embraced the power of the Force just as much as it did player agency. It could be played as a shooter or third-person Jedi game. Players also had to decide if they embraced the light or dark side of the Force, a choice that dictated which powers they could wield. Dark Forces II was the first game to show us just how much fun multiplayer could be with Force-powered characters. The experience was rounded out with a great story that unfolded through live-action cutscenes accompanied by John Williams' score.

197 LODERUNNER

PC, Apple II • 1983

Lode Runner combined twitch Pac-Man skills with the ability to dig into the level, trap enemies, and collect gold, creating an ever-changing puzzle game with seemingly infinite configurations, including levels of your own design. It also required both quick thinking and the strategic foresight to decipher increasingly complex levels, becoming a must-have for the home computer, and setting itself apart in the arcade-dominated market.



195 HOMEWORLD

PC • 1999

An RTS among the stars, Homeworld game players control of detailed battles between starships, letting sci-fi opera fans live out their dreams in a virtual space.

194 CENTIPEDE

Arcade • 1980

Centipede's colorful art helped the game stand out from the early arcade pack. Its intense bug-blasting action and catchy sounds kept us digging for quarters.

193 DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

SNES • 1994

Donkey Kong Country impressed with its gorgeous 16-bit visuals depicting a verdant jungle, along with top-notch platforming that made it an instant classic.

192 AMNESIA: THE DARK DESCENT

PC • 2010

Amnesia set a new high bar for survival horror. With its suffocating atmosphere and unexpected scares, few can forget the nightmares of exploring Brennenburg Castle.



191 ACTRAISER

SNES • 1991

As an unlikely experiment in genre fusion, ActRaiser was hard to classify. Each act began and ended with traditional side-scrolling action, in which you controlled a statue animated by the essence of a god. These levels challenged you with precise platforming and impressive boss fights, like a minotaur and flying pharaoh head. After the battle was won, you became a disembodied deity charged with developing civilizations and looking out for the welfare of your worshippers. Your angel emissary battled monsters while you called upon miracles like earthquakes and lightning strikes to guide your cities to prosperity. This unconventional structure provided a steady stream of new challenges, and since the sequel ditched the city-building to focus solely on action, ActRaiser remains a one-of-a-kind experience.



190 COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT

PC • 1996

A prequel to the original game, Red Alert was heralded for its slick user interface, variety in unit types, and deep well of base-building and combat strategies. The race to end a battle with a nuclear blast delivered nail-biting excitement for multiplayer battles. The single-player campaign was also good, delivering plenty of storytelling camp amid nicely designed missions and maps.

189 FIFA 15

PS4, Xbox One • 2014

The gameplay turned a corner with this iteration, bringing it on par with its bevy of already strong features: the addictive Ultimate Team mode, numerous league/team licenses, and globe-spanning career mode. It felt less reliant on canned animations than in the past, freeing gamers to make the players on the pitch come alive, and helped the series become synonymous with the ever-increasing popularity of the sport around the globe.





188 MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PC • 2006

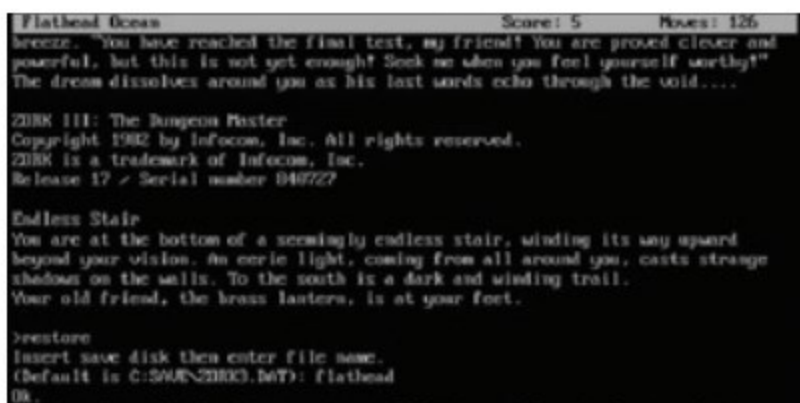
All of the historical and fantastical Total War games are good, but Medieval II stood out for its strong tactical design and curve-ball throwing Papacy mechanic.



187 TWISTED METAL 2

PS1 • 1996

SingleTrac's sequel took the car-combat action on a global road trip. Paris, Moscow, and more were set ablaze as Sweet Tooth and crew tore through the streets.



186 ZORK

PC • 1977

Though this text game is hard to go back to now, Zork is undisputedly the progenitor of any video game that sought to emulate having an adventure.



185 ASSASSIN'S CREED

PS3, Xbox 360 • 2007

Whether free-climbing walls, leaping from church steeples, or fleeing the site of an assassination, Assassin's Creed redefined freedom for a generation of games.

184 DRAGON QUEST VIII: JOURNEY OF THE CURSED KING

PS2 • 2005

Dragon Quest VIII remains one of the most beloved entries to date, often being considered the series' best outing. This entry added charming new characters, an alchemy system, and tension levels in battle. It also had one of the most exciting worlds to explore, where you were always stumbling upon something whether it was a treasure chest or new monster to capture.



183 SUPER MEAT BOY

360 • 2010

Punishing platformers are a dime a dozen nowadays, and it's all thanks to a sentient piece of protein. Super Meat Boy masterfully balanced an endless array of seemingly impossible challenges against pitch-perfect controls. Instant restarts and an entertaining replay mode that showed off your (dozens of) deadly failures helped keep frustration at bay, but the impeccable level design is why Super Meat Boy remains the king of the indie platformer years after release.

182 EVERQUEST

PC • 1999

While EverQuest wasn't the first MMORPG, it certainly was the one that put the genre on the map. An astonishing, huge world and in-depth character classes gave players the ability to live inside their avatars and explore bold new lands. Socializing with other characters, whether you were just trading for new weapons and armor, grouping up to delve deeper into a newly discovered dungeon, or forming a professional raiding guild that would play for hours or even days on end, was a critical part of the experience. The combined sense of building a permanent playgroup and taking on increasingly challenging zones and encounters proved incredibly thrilling and addictive, and those who experienced the early days of this now titanic genre know that they can never be replicated.





181 SUPER MARIO BROS. 2

NES • 1988

Many gamers may scoff at Mario's "illegitimate" second outing, but the variable character powers, interesting foes, and egg-lobbing action were great in their own right.



180 BATTLEFIELD 1942

PC • 2002

The military multiplayer shooter that started it all, 1942's addictive blend of air, land, and sea battles had us playing just one more match well into the night.

178 ASTEROIDS

Arcade • 1979

Asteroids' physics produced thrilling moments as you managed the inertia of your ship in the zero-g of vector space while blasting asteroids. This simple premise was refined with the ability to rotate the ship, perform blind hyperspace jumps, and travel off one side of the screen and appear on the other side. The clean graphical lines went hand in hand with the required gameplay precision to nail increasingly smaller asteroid fragments and avoid death.



179 SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC • 2005

After a private military contractor hijacked a North Korean missile system, it triggered an international incident that threatened war. Fortunately, Third Echelon had a secret weapon designed to defuse these situations. His name was Sam Fisher. Ubisoft's third Splinter Cell simplified the series' cumbersome stealth mechanics without sacrificing its intense cat-and-mouse action. The entire game had an edge of realism missing from most stealth games. Enemies moved in life-like patrols, and Sam had to circumnavigate them by hanging from pipes, shooting out lights, and using a range of stealth gadgets that would make James Bond jealous. Splinter Cell's unique Spies vs. Mercs multiplayer mode also returned to provide a refreshing mix of FPS deathmatch-meets-stealth action. Hide and seek was never this fun.



177 GUITAR HERO

PS2 • 2005

Years before plastic instruments filled homes across the world, a small team at Harmonix Music Systems kickstarted a phenomenon. The developer, previously known for its work on Amplitude and Karaoke Revolution, provided an all new way for players to experience their favorite songs. Hitting the strum-bar of a controller shaped like a small guitar while pressing corresponding buttons was easy to play, but difficult to master. This gameplay style let anyone feel like a rock star, especially as you amped up to top your previous outing. Though the formula and gameplay were improved in subsequent games, the debut stood out as an innovative and important title for one of the biggest mainstream hits in recent memory.

176 BEJWELED

PC • 2001

PopCap's puzzle game grew from its Flash roots to become the template for an entire genre. Matching colors and shattering gems was satisfying, drawing in casual players and hardcore aficionados alike. Its runaway success attracted a host of clones, and helped put PopCap on the map as a studio known for creating fun, bite-sized games. Even to this day, setting up and executing a lengthy combo is a rewarding rush – even if naysayers say it's all about luck.



175 DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION

PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360, PC • 2014

After Dragon Age II disappointed fans with its underwhelming environments, Inquisition had a lot to prove. Thankfully, BioWare was up for the challenge. The game not only boasted the series' biggest world to date, but it also had the largest and most diverse cast yet. As the Inquisitor, you confronted Thedas' political turmoil, dealt with the Breach's dangers, and made plenty of choices for the turbulent world's fate. It was the comeback the series needed.

174 LEFT 4 DEAD

360, PC • 2008

Left 4 Dead didn't just kick off a new, decade-long zombie fad in the video game industry; it also reinvented co-op. The undead masses demanded players stick together as they scavenged for supplies and shot their way from one safehouse to the next. Escaping each chapter's final invasion required teamwork and planning, and often ended in the spontaneous moments of heroism and/or cowardice that zombie flicks are made of. Zombies may be cliché, but Left 4 Dead isn't.



173 BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN

PS2, Xbox • 2004

Burnout 3 took the goal of most racing games – finish first – and turned it on its head. It combined the instinct to beat everyone to the finish line with the desire to pound them into oblivion. Crashing and ramming cars, along with other dangerous moves in traffic, earned you boost, pushing the game's sense of speed to eye-watering limits and challenging players to eke their way around the tracks. You could even earn after-crash control of your car in a glorious slow-motion sequence that was expanded on in the standalone mode that made the series famous: Crash mode. Maximum damage was the goal, in all its destructive set piece glory. Developer Criterion went on to successfully expand the series into more open world directions, but Burnout 3 was the ultimate arcade expression of road rage.



172 ULTIMA VII: THE BLACK GATE

PC • 1992

Creator Richard Garriott's favorite Ultima game, the Black Gate set the living, breathing open-world standard that inspired games like Skyrim and The Witcher 3.



171 THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

360, PC • 2006

The door of the prison dungeon opened, revealing a world to be explored in every direction. Oblivion's polish and accessibility brought the masses to the RPG scene.



170 NINJA GAIDEN

NES • 1989

Ninja Gaiden's cinematic cutscenes were revolutionary, but its true legacy lies in its unflinching difficulty. You didn't "beat" Ninja Gaiden; you mastered it.



169 GRIM FANDANGO

PC • 1998

Despite some obtuse puzzles, this Lucas-Arts classic conceptually flourished with a colorful afterlife world, noir themes, and witty dialogue.

167 STARDEW VALLEY

PC • 2016

The appeal of Stardew Valley wasn't about presenting new ideas – it was about refining and combining old ones. Drawing inspiration from sims like Harvest Moon and Minecraft, Stardew Valley mixed farming, crafting, and combat into an experience full of old-school charm. The likeable residents of Pelican Town created an immersive sense of community, and the satisfaction of going through your list of chores extended countless play sessions for "just one more day."



168 CRASH BANDICOOT: WARPED

PS1 • 1998

Crash Bandicoot was the face of PlayStation, a mascot whose name was held in the same breath as Mario and Sonic. Naughty Dog ran with the success of the original game, releasing a complete trilogy in just three years' time. The final installment, Crash Bandicoot 3: Warped, showed a developer that was confident with its character and game, offering finely polished platforming levels and ambitious vehicle-based sections. Crash's wild movements were a blast to control, but he wasn't alone this time. In a variety of amusing levels, players also took control of Coco, Crash's sister. PlayStation 1 graphics haven't withstood the test of time as well as we had hoped, but Warped's colorful vistas still look good today – a testament to just how far Naughty Dog pushed the series and the hardware.



166 SUPER BOMBERMAN

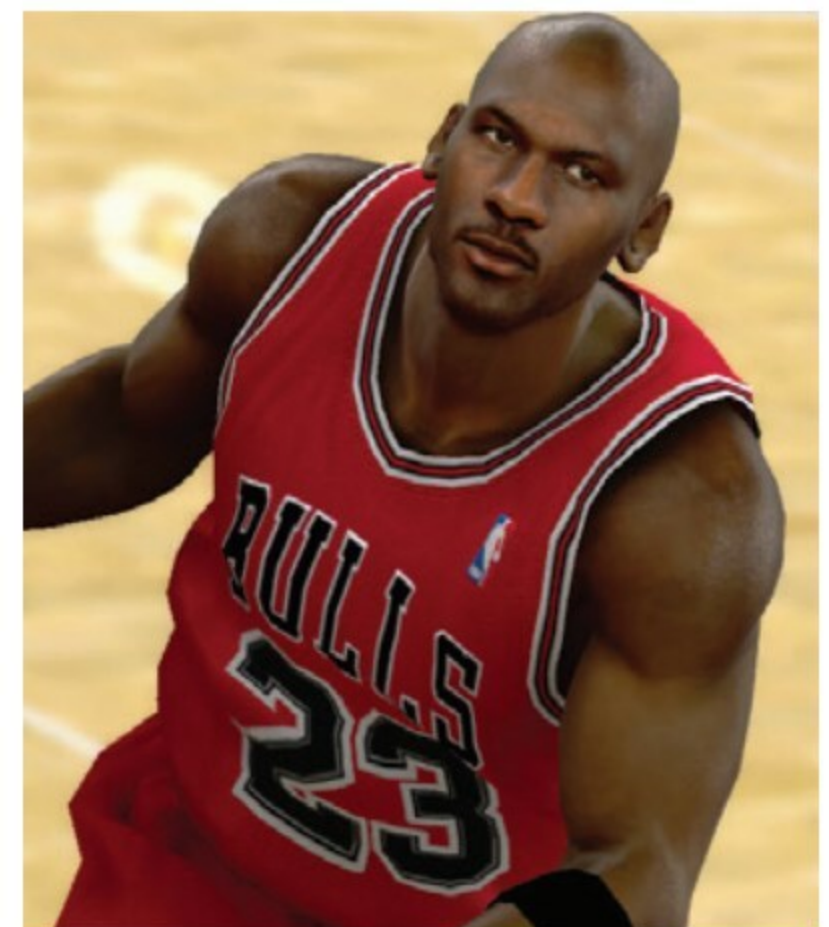
SNES • 1993

Sometimes your love of a video game is all about the time and place you played it. In the case of Super Bomberman, that happens to be "anytime" and "anyplace." A night of four-player Super Bomberman never disappointed. The suite of arenas and power-ups gave matches just enough variety, without complicating the sheer fun of blowing up your friends. The Bomberman series has had its share of duds over the years, but we still adore the classic, explosive formula.

165 NBA 2K11

PS3, 360, PC • 2010

The NBA 2K series has dominated the virtual hardwood for more than a decade, but the 2K11 edition is our favorite. A studio that continually explores innovation, in 2010 Visual Concepts introduced the Jordan Challenge, which put players in the shoes of the GOAT and dared them to match some of his most amazing career feats. Fans adored the historical presentation and situational commentary, adding another must-play mode to the impressive suite of hoops offerings.



164 SUIKODEN II

PS1 • 1999

This sequel took the series to the next level with its intense story about politics and betrayal. The narrative puts you at odds with your childhood friend, with things only intensifying with unexpected deaths and the vile antagonist Luca Blight. Its most impressive feat is making you feel sympathy for people who engage in vicious actions in the name of war. Few things are as satisfying as rallying all 108 Stars of Destiny to your cause and watching your HQ grow.



163 SPELUNKY

360 • 2012

If you're one of those people who thumbs their nose at procedurally generated content, you probably haven't played Spelunky. Mossmouth's roguelike homage to Spelunker took a wealth of enemies, traps, and treasures, and assembled them into an ever-evolving gauntlet of organized chaos every time you played. Your job was to manage that chaos as best you could, and even though death comes quickly at first, each time you delved into the caves you learned something new. Despite being an action platformer, strategy is king in Spelunky; each choice you made while exploring either brought you one step closer to Olmec's Lair or ended in your certain doom. Players could unlock shortcuts to the four multi-staged worlds, but nothing beat the thrill of a start-to-finish win – no matter how many tries it took.



162 ADVANCE WARS

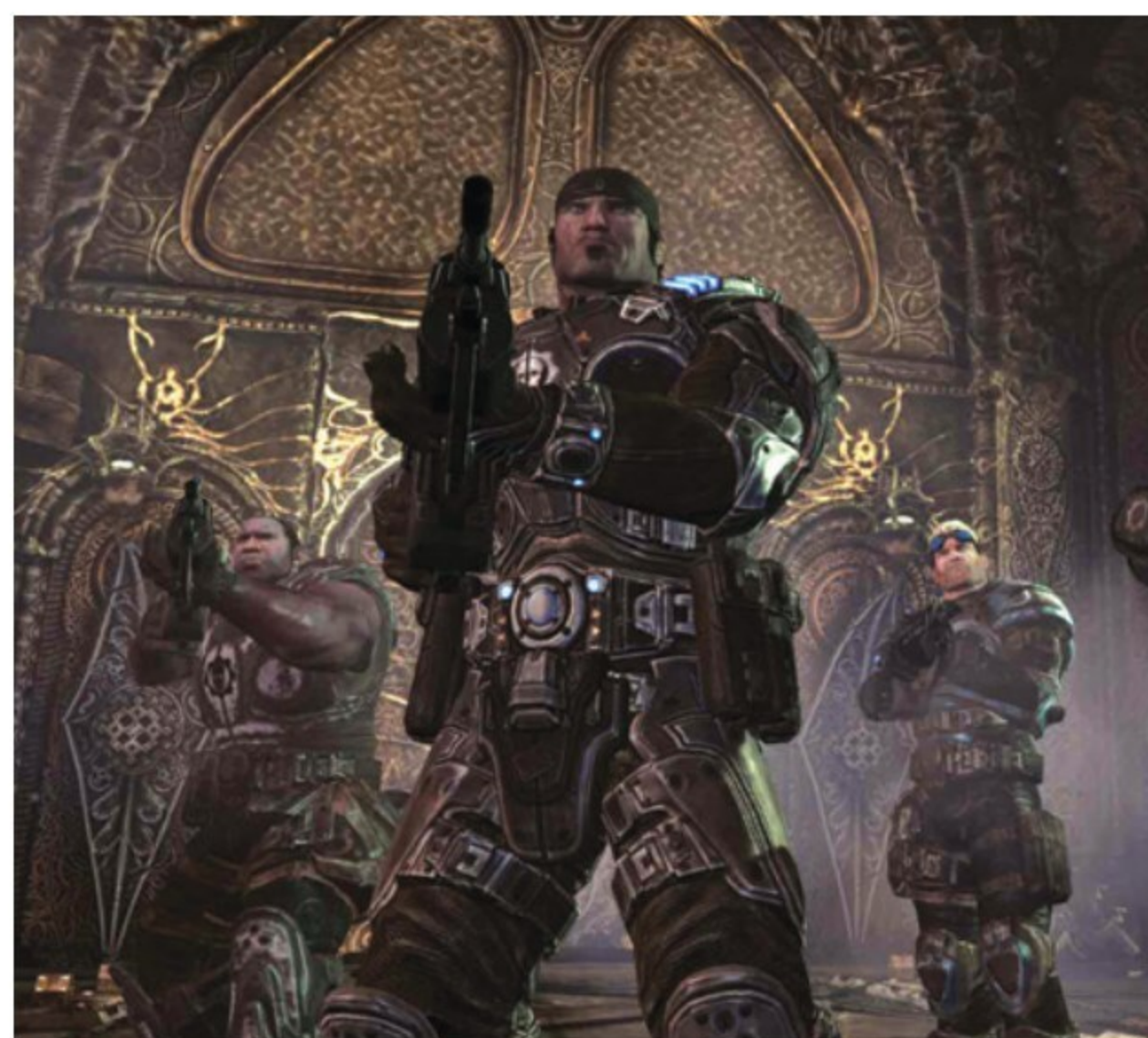
GBA • 2001

Advance Wars was a masterpiece of turn-based strategy packed into a tiny cartridge. The tough-as-nails campaign forced players to use every unit, piece of terrain, and power at their disposal, making every hard-fought victory a thrill. The presentation was immaculate as well, with a sea of adorable warfighters, a fantastic cast of commanding officers, a versatile map editor, and multiplayer drawing players in hours after they saved the land of Wars World.

161 GEARS OF WAR 2

360 • 2008

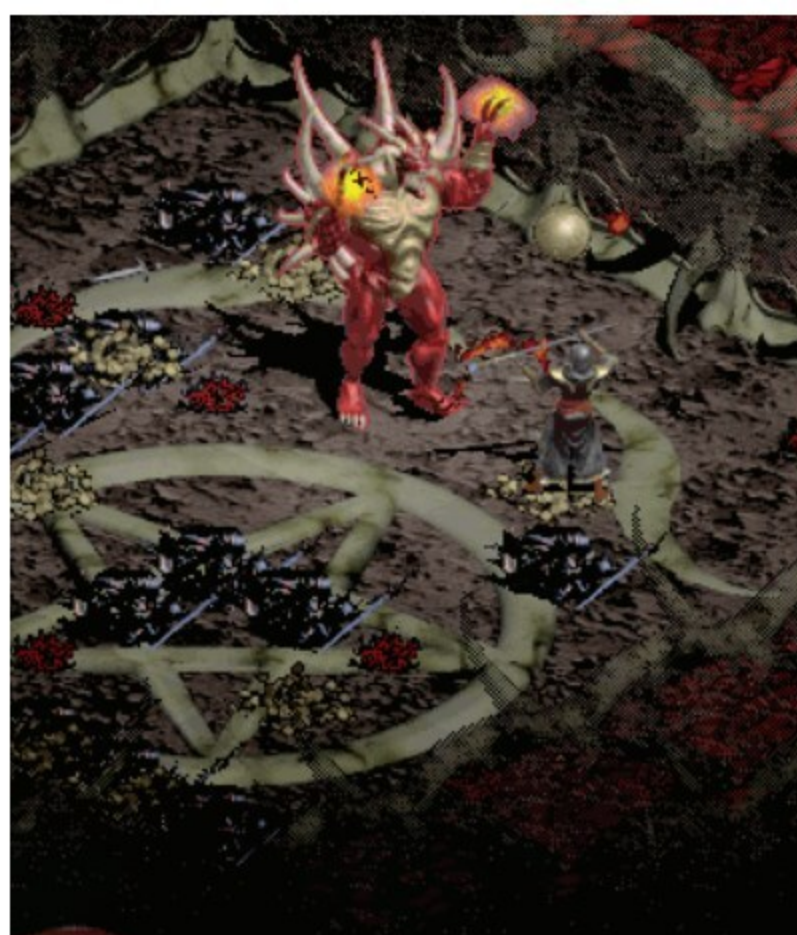
Building on the groundwork the original Gears of War laid for the cover-based shooter, Gears of War 2 became the premier example of the franchise's gunplay. Gears of War 2 not only improved the gameplay, A.I., and pacing, but added new characters and enemies, and told a better story than the first game. This second entry also upgraded the series' competitive multiplayer suite, while introducing Horde mode, popularizing wave-based survival as a destination mode.



160 ROCKET LEAGUE

PS4 • 2015

This vehicular soccer game mixes sport with the likes of Twisted Metal, which made it a bizarre but addictively fun experience. It's a blast to play with friends or with a group on-line, and it quickly became not just an indie hit, but an esports and livestreaming favorite. Even today, developer Psyonix provides consistent improvements to the game with several post-launch updates, keeping the experience fresh with new skins, arenas, events, and more.



159 DIABLO

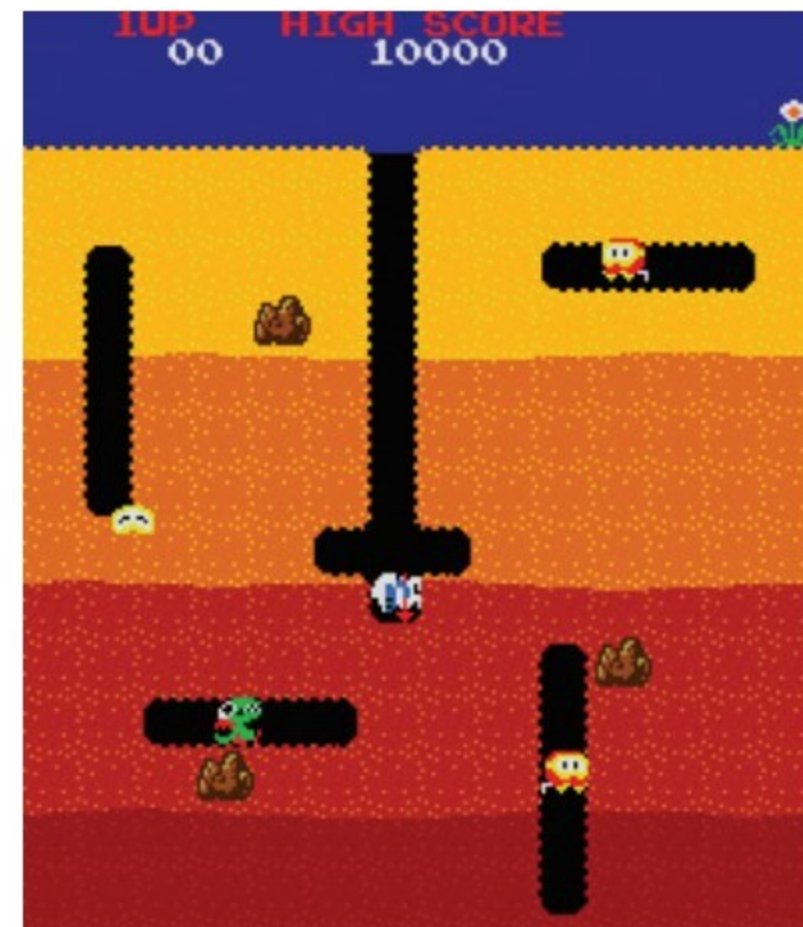
PC • 1996

Blizzard's grim gothic action/RPG dungeon crawl continues to inspire today, with its iconic health and mana globes and color-coded item system. Randomly generated dungeons and the quest to find epic loot sank its hooks into a generation of PC gamers. Journeying to the depths of hell with the surprise scare of The Butcher, the terrifying Skeleton King, the vile archbishop and Diablo himself was a wild romp as a warrior, rogue, or sorcerer.

158 DIG DUG

Arcade • 1982

Don't think too hard about what you're doing in Dig Dug, lest you feel bad for the monsters. Your hero defeated dragons and puffballs by crushing them with rocks and inflating them with an air hose until they burst. Fortunately, carving through the colorful world and dropping rocks on enemies was so fun (and oddly cute) that it was easy to ignore all of its horrors. We'll give credit to the game's sparse, peppy music, which gave a welcome break between each stage.



157 DARK SOULS II

PS3, 360, PC • 2014

Dark Souls thrived on making players discover its secrets for themselves, which made returning to that formula a daunting challenge. Dark Souls II handled it wonderfully, shaking up just enough of its brutal challenge that returning players couldn't rely on old knowledge about stats, combat, and enemies to expedite their journey through the mysterious land of Drangleic. Bosses could be around any corner (and pounce out of nowhere, in one case), and more streamlined multiplayer meant players had to watch out for more invading foes but could more easily recruit friends to their cause. Despite these changes, Dark Souls II stayed true to its roots, giving players the powerful mix of eerie landscapes, tough encounters, and obscure lore that had made the series so captivating in the first place.



156 TOMB RAIDER

PS1, Saturn, PC • 1996

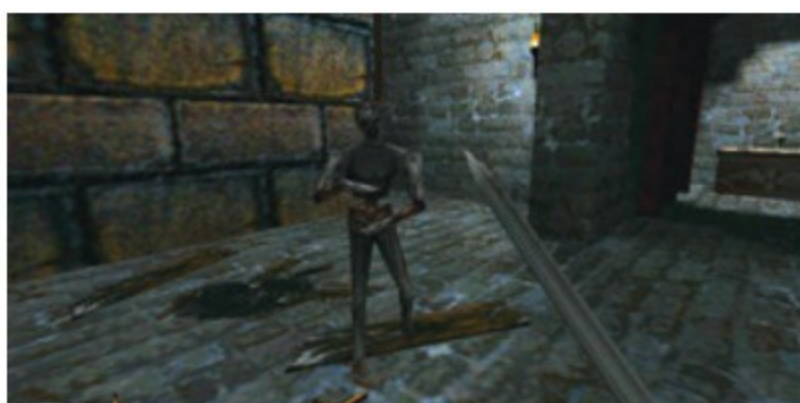
Tomb Raider became a cultural phenomenon. Lara's delve into ancient ruins stirred the imagination, setting the stage for the 3D action/adventure genre.



155 FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS

PS3, 360, PC • 2010

New Vegas was filled with fantastic characters, branching paths, and flexible upgrade systems that convinced players to journey through the Mojave Wasteland repeatedly.



154 THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT

PC • 1998

A foundational title for stealth games, the complex A.I. and non-confrontational gameplay would influence many of the genre's best games in the years to come.



153 SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS

SNES • 1996

Lovable characters and Square's special take on turn-based combat made Mario's first jump into the world of RPGs a blast.

152 ESPN NFL 2K5

PS2, Xbox • 2004

This game planted a flag for features that are still missing from football games, such as The Crib, customizable divisions, cutting-edge presentation, and extensive game planning. Visual Concepts' NFL swansong still holds up today even in the gameplay department – a rarity for sports games. This entry was so beloved it's the expected template for any NFL title the studio would make in the future as well as the standard that some fans hold for all football games.



151 DEVIL MAY CRY 3: DANTE'S AWAKENING

PS2 • 2005

Devil May Cry 3 restored fans' faith by expanding Dante's repertoire and embracing challenging fights. The story focused on the sibling rivalry between Dante and Vergil, which provided players an excuse to slash and shoot demons while amassing a hellish arsenal. The special edition built on that foundation by including Vergil as a playable character, giving players exciting new ways to shape their approach to combat.

150 THE WALKING DEAD

PS3, 360, PC • 2012

The Walking Dead was an intense emotional ride that became Telltale's biggest success story. With a well-written branching narrative, it popularized the choice-driven adventure genre and paved the way for several of Telltale's licensed partnerships. You played as Lee Everett, whose trip to prison was unexpectedly interrupted by a zombie apocalypse. He then met a young girl named Clementine, and the bond they formed throughout their fight for survival was unforgettably touching. Your actions slightly adapted the story, from how you interacted with fellow survivors to how much violence you allowed Clementine to witness. The Walking Dead was dark and full of anguish, but the experience, especially at the time of its release, was unlike any other.

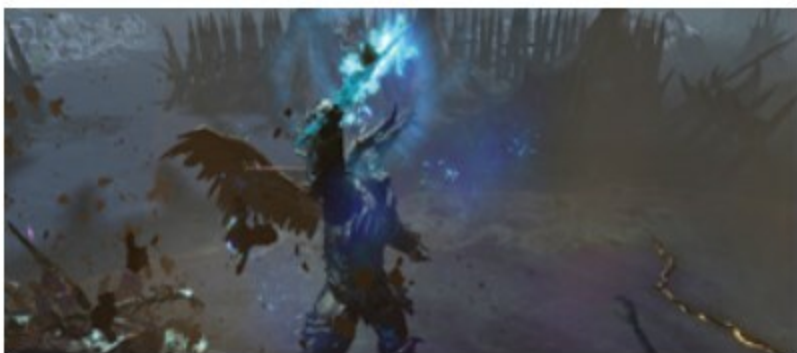




149 DESTINY

PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360 • 2014

Bungie's shared-world shooter borrowed the best of fantasy and sci-fi tropes and gave us an adventure filled with cooperation, competition, and years of discovery.



148 PATH OF EXILE

PC • 2013

Grinding Gear Games proved "free-to-play" wasn't synonymous with "shallow." Its action-RPG was an expansive take on Diablo that rewarded fans of deep, customizable systems.

146 WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS

PC • 2002

Blizzard's real-time fantasy strategy game pinnacle, Warcraft III, built upon the success of the two previous entries with substantial changes. The campaign introduced upgradeable hero units, and the multiplayer introduced skill-based matchmaking. The Defense of the Ancients (Dota) mod also spawned out of its world editor, laying the foundation for the MOBA genre.



147 PORTAL 2

PS3, 360, PC • 2011

After the surprise success of Portal, fans were cautiously optimistic about a sequel. Would the core portal-shooting mechanic, GLaDOS, and the mysterious world of Aperture Science be able to sustain a full-length experience? Thankfully the answer to those questions was a resounding yes. Portal 2 outdid the original's amazing puzzle design by expanding on the core mechanic, adding blue and orange goo, and including a full, separate cooperative campaign. It also had some of the best dialogue ever written for a video game and a cast of video games' best characters, despite including only one living human with Chell. This is a list of the best games of all time, but if we were to create a list of the funniest games ever, you can guarantee Portal 2 would be in the top 10.



145 DIVINITY: ORIGINAL SIN II

PC • 2017

Larian Studios redefined what it means to be a PC RPG in 2017, giving developers something to aspire to. Allowing players to devise their own solutions to any challenge, the classic fantasy RPG was powered by the same element-centric turn-based combat system that made the first Divinity: Original Sin grand. With characters who ranged from arrogant and brash to inquisitive and otherworldly, the player piloted their crew through a handcrafted and reactive tale. Whether you chose to use your wits to sneak past an enemy, engage it head on with swords and sorcery, or simply talk your way out of a tough situation, Divinity: Original Sin 2 presented a world where anything seemed – and often was – possible.



144 PAC-MAN

Arcade • 1980

Pac-Man not only convinced millions to give up their quarters as they vied for a top spot on the score charts, but also gave birth to video game merchandising.

143 GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED

360 • 2005

Every movement mattered, and surviving longer meant more enemies came to attack. This intensity made players flock to Retro Evolved for scoring competitions.

142 TECMO SUPER BOWL

NES • 1991

How beloved is this NES football game? Fans still update its rosters, and national tournaments bring the community together in Madison, Wisconsin each year.

141 DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

PS3, 360, PC • 2009

BioWare's fantasy RPG was all about conflict – interpersonally and with the Darkspawn. Politics and turmoil made you agonize over being a hero in a chaotic world.



140 WARLORDS

Arcade • 1980

Who would have thought that a simple thing like a bouncing ball would have such a huge footprint in *Game Informers'* top 300 games of all-time list? Pong, Arkanoid, and Warlords all used a bouncing ball to deliver a surprising amount of intensity. Warlords was one of the most competitive arcade games of its day, pitting four-players against each other on a cocktail-style machine. A player occupied each corner of the screen and was tasked with protecting their respective stronghold by moving a paddle to knock a ball away. If a shot got through a piece of the stronghold was destroyed. Up to four balls can be on the playfield at any time, creating chaos and forcing the player to move quickly. Warlords is one of those rare, timeless games that is just as much fun today as it was when it released in 1980.



139 AGE OF EMPIRES II: THE AGE OF KINGS

PC, Mac • 1999

During the golden age of RTS games, Age of Empires II had few peers. Assembling massive armies and castles – and breaking them all down – proved to be some of the best LAN party fare PC gamers had ever seen. Unique units for each of the 20 civilizations added immense flavor and tactical choice. Whether you wanted to create a buzzing hive of Chinese Chu No Ku archers or a bludgeoning battering force of Persian war elephants, the choices were myriad and meaningful.

138 METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY

PS2 • 2001

When fans say Hideo Kojima is a master of subverting expectations, MGS2 is the reason why. Players were thrown for a loop when they realized they wouldn't play the entire game as Solid Snake, and that was just the start of the rabbit hole. By the time players snuck their way through Big Shell, their perception of Metal Gear and reality itself were put into question in the most mind-blowing way imaginable.



137 PERSONA 4

PS2 • 2008

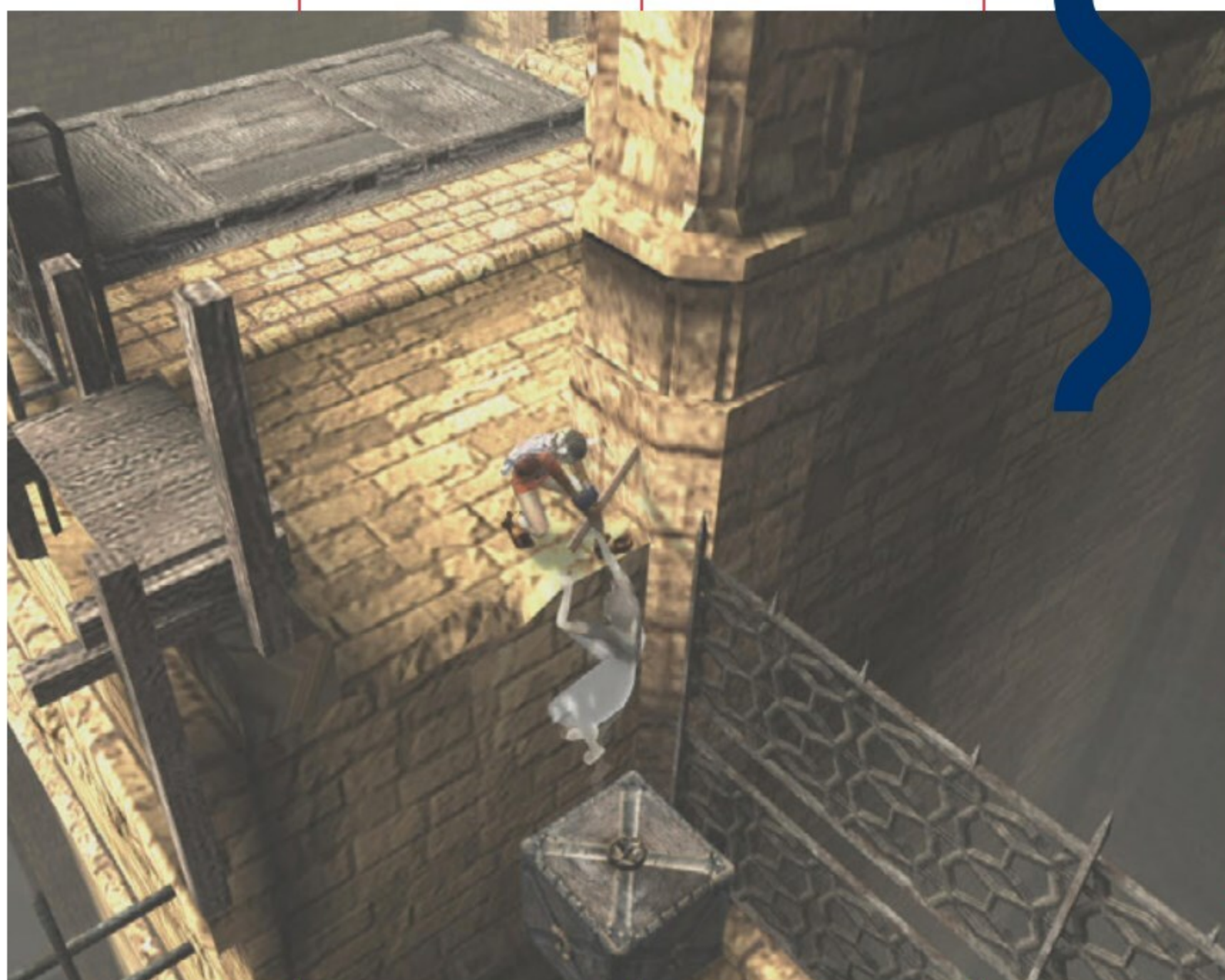
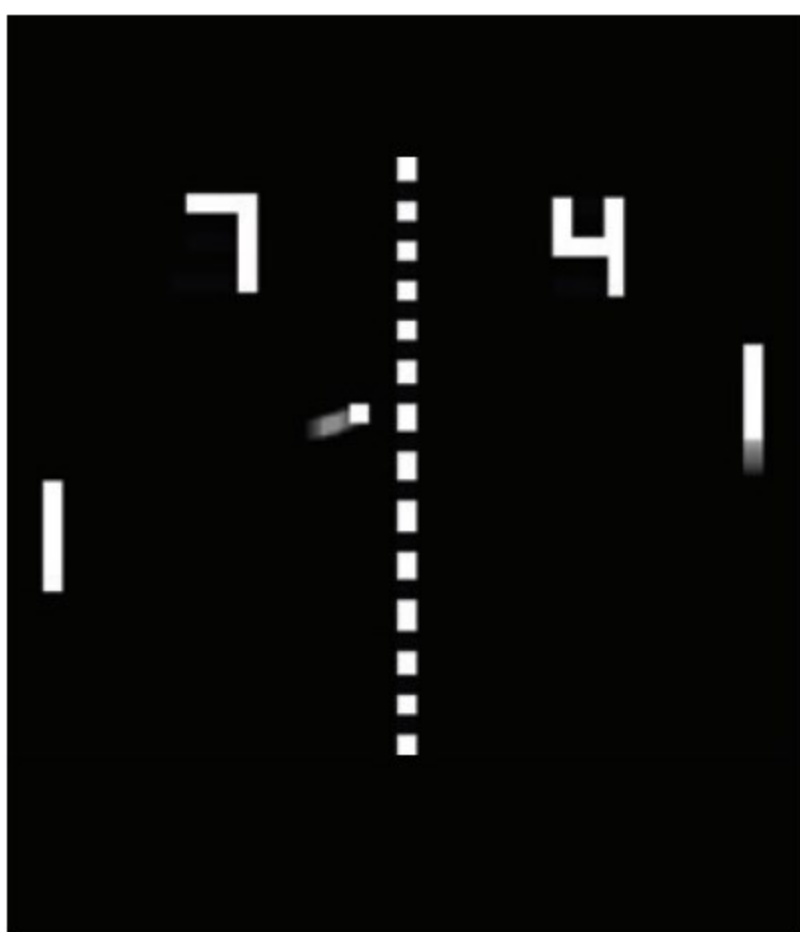
Persona 3 set a solid groundwork for the series' revival, but it was Persona 4 that improved the formula and garnered the most attention. With better combat and more creative dungeons, Persona 4 also continued to explore mature themes and complicated issues, especially in terms of identity and being strong enough to accept your true self. The varied, relatable cast is the most popular one to date, later starring in several spin-off titles.



136 PONG

Arcade • 1972

Pong may not have been the original implementation of video-game tennis, but it was the first to achieve commercial success. And success is an understatement. Atari's first game was a sensation before there were video arcades, with its first test run at a California bar ending once the machine overflowed with quarters. The game's reach grew exponentially from there, eventually bouncing into homes as a standalone console before the Atari 2600's release.



135 ICO

PS2 • 2001

Escort quests are not among gamers' favorite activities; something about your fate being tied to a defenseless follower invites a variety of frustrations. However, the team behind Ico turned this concept into an incredible and touching journey. Controlling a young boy, you guided a mysterious woman named Yorda through an enormous castle; she helped you overcome magical obstacles, and you protected her from an army of shadow beasts that emerged if you left her unguarded.

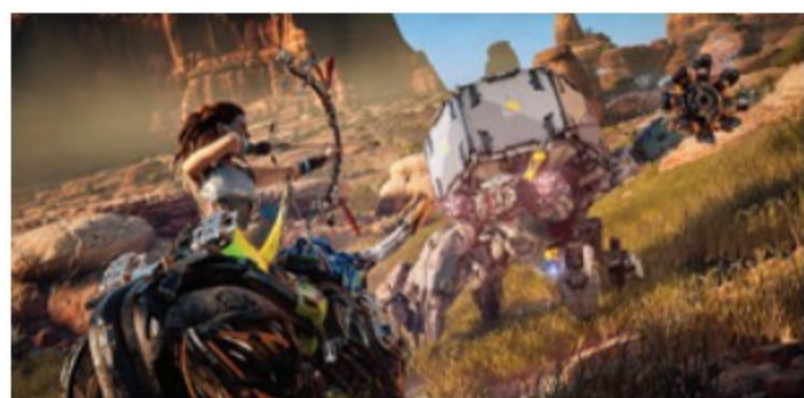
The stunning art direction and clever puzzle design gave the world an ancient and wondrous feeling, but the most remarkable aspect was the wordless bond which slowly formed between the two main characters. Yorda felt like a true companion – not a liability – which added gravity to a finale that made more than a few players tear up.



134 STREET FIGHTER III: 3RD STRIKE

Dreamcast • 2000

Originally seen as not moving the genre forward compared to the zany Street Fighter Alpha series and fan-favorite crossovers, Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike has proven itself a landmark fighting game in the years since. The parry system not only forced players to rethink fundamental aspects of the genre, but also meant there were no sure victories. Exchanges were short and furious, requiring a nuanced mix of strategy and technical mastery. Its quality-of-life improvements, like two-button throws and EX moves, have appeared in nearly every fighting game since. And for a game old enough to drink, its style matched its substance, featuring some of the most fluid sprite animations ever made and a soundtrack that oozes style. When it comes to settling differences with your fists, 3rd Strike is hard to beat.



132 HORIZON ZERO DAWN

PS4 • 2017

Aloy's genre-bending quest for her identity in the face of world-dominating machines dazzled with its intense combat and exciting sense of discovery.

MURPH'S OPTIONS									
SPELL	USE	ITEM	RUN	PARRY	TAKE	BACK			
#	CHARACTER NAME	CLASS	AC	HITS	STATUS				
1	ELWOOD	N-FIG	4000	0000	STIGHT				
2	MATT	N-FIG	4000	0000	STIGHT				
3	BLUELOU	N-FIG	4000	0000	STIGHT				
4	JAKE	N-THI	4000	0000	STIGHT				
5	MR. TABULOUS	N-MAG	4000	0000	STIGHT				
6	MURPH	N-MAG	4000	0000	STIGHT				

131 WIZARDRY: PROVING GROUNDS OF THE MAD OVERLORD

Apple II • 1981

Sir-Tech's text-heavy dungeon crawl provided the backbone for many of the long-running RPG series that followed.

133 KATAMARI DAMACY

PS2 • 2004

The King of All Cosmos got drunk and knocked everything in existence out of place. Therefore, you must roll around a giant sticky ball and pick everything up. This ludicrous premise was all it took to launch us into a rollicking adventure rooted in absurdity and a strangely optimistic theme of universal togetherness. Quirky physics-based game-play and endlessly hummable music kept us coming back to the insanity again and again.

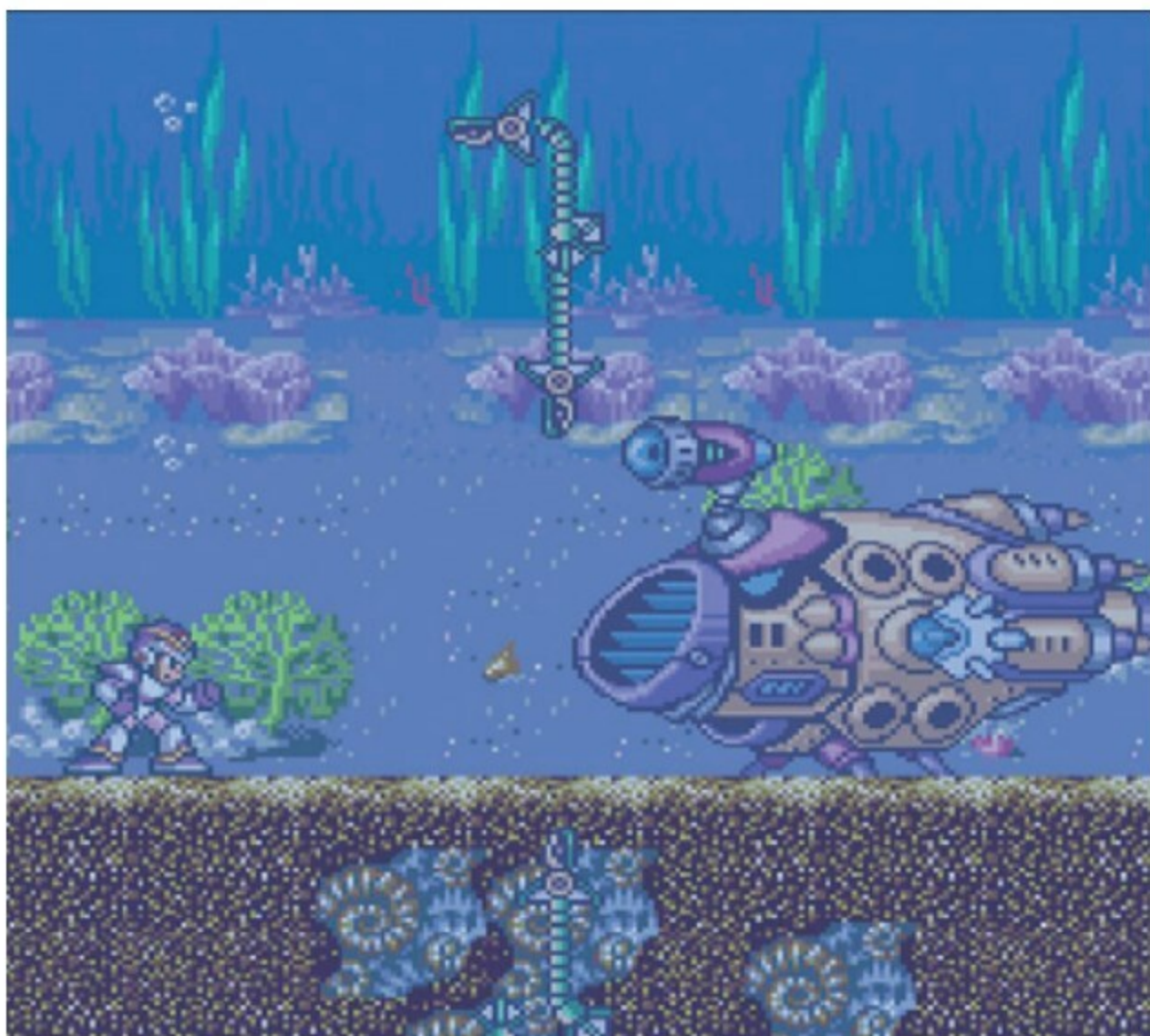


130 SOULCALIBUR

Dreamcast • 1999

Soulcalibur was an early highpoint of accessibility meeting depth. Being able to move in any direction meant anyone could weave in and out of combat in an instant, making Soulcalibur feel more responsive than any 3D fighter before it. It also gave fights a newfound intricacy, as players had to choose the right move based on how far *and* wide it hit. This sounds technical, but anyone who picked up a controller and played could understand these nuances in minutes and just beat the crap out of their opponents. A diverse cast also offered a character to fans of just about every weapon, including swords, axes, and nunchucks. Combos were easy to pull off, but fights were fun even if both sides simply traded back-and-forth slashes, making it the kind of pick-up-and-play experience many fighting games still chase today.





129 MEGA MAN X

SNES • 1993

Mega Man X was more than a continuation of a popular NES franchise to a new platform. Ability upgrades and mechanics like dashing and wall jumping changed how you approached level traversal and combat. X may have shared the color scheme of his predecessor, but he had no trouble standing apart and establishing a new sub-franchise. It stands as a high-point of level design and player control across all Mega Man games and also has one of the best soundtracks ever.

128 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK

N64 • 2000

Even in a series that features alternate worlds and menacing evil green pigs, Majora's Mask stands out as the weird Zelda. It had a dreamlike quality, with Link running into characters he first met during Ocarina of Time – or bizarre versions of those characters. Actually, it was more like a nightmare, as players faced a *Groundhog Day*-like time loop that culminated with the moon crashing down and destroying the world.



127 FINAL FANTASY X

PS2 • 2001

With gorgeous visuals and voice-acted dialogue, Final Fantasy X shepherded the franchise into the modern era. Perfected turn-based combat and a compelling story in a beautiful world made it a great entry for long-time fans and newcomers alike. The breathtaking world of Spira was ripe with enticing mysteries to peel back, and experiencing the many narrative twists with such an amazing cast of characters made for one of the finest entries in the beloved RPG series.



126 BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

PS3, 360, PC • 2011

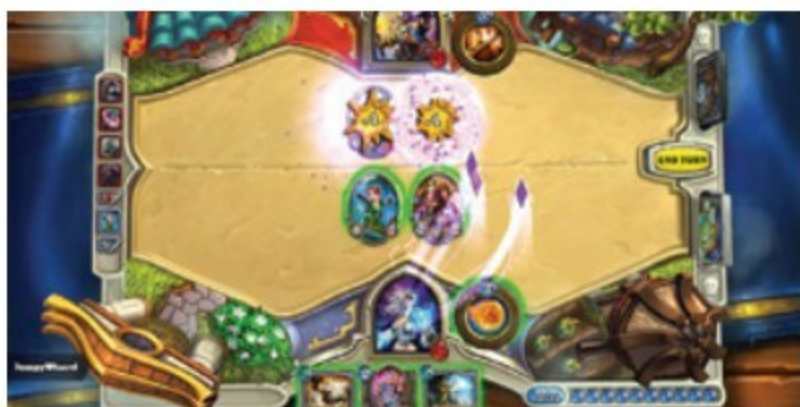
After the runaway success of Arkham Asylum, Rocksteady went bigger with the sequel. Doing away with the narrow corridors of the first game's eponymous asylum, Arkham City gave players an open-world district of Gotham City to take back from legions of criminal masterminds. While Joker was still Batman's greatest rival, facing off against the Dark Knight's huge stable of adversaries within the massive playground of Arkham City proved the most memorable experience.

125 PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS

PC • 2017

Battle royale game veteran Brendan "PlayerUnknown" Greene's first standalone title burst into the main artery of gaming with the simple hook of dropping players onto a deserted island and making them scavenge and shoot their way to victory against 99 other players seeking to do the same. The intense battles and stream-worthy action kept players coming back throughout 2017, and PUBG shows no sign of slowing down.





124 HEARTHSTONE

PC, Mac • 2014

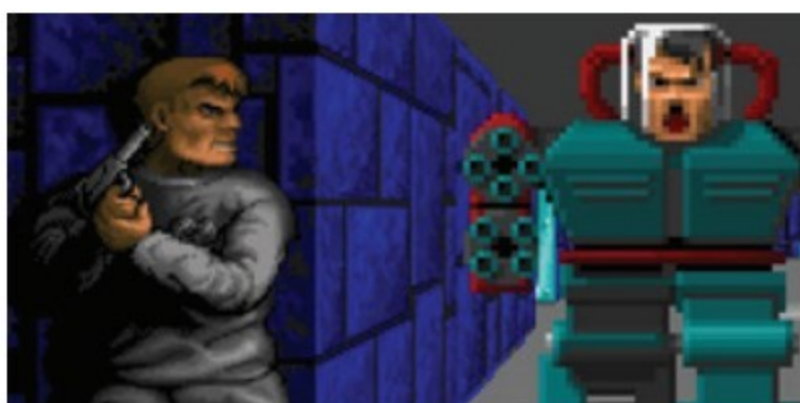
Blizzard's free-to-play digital card game experiment paid off big time, becoming a destination experience that has kept players hooked with a steady stream of content.



123 GAUNTLET

Arcade • 1985

If you saw four-players huddled tightly around an arcade unit, they were likely journeying as a party in Gauntlet, a great class-based multiplayer dungeon crawler.



122 WOLFENSTEIN 3D

PC • 1992

Doom brought the first-person shooter screaming into the mainstream, but Wolfenstein and the antics of Nazi-killing hero B.J. Blazkowicz is where the genre was born.



121 GRAN TURISMO 3: A-SPEC

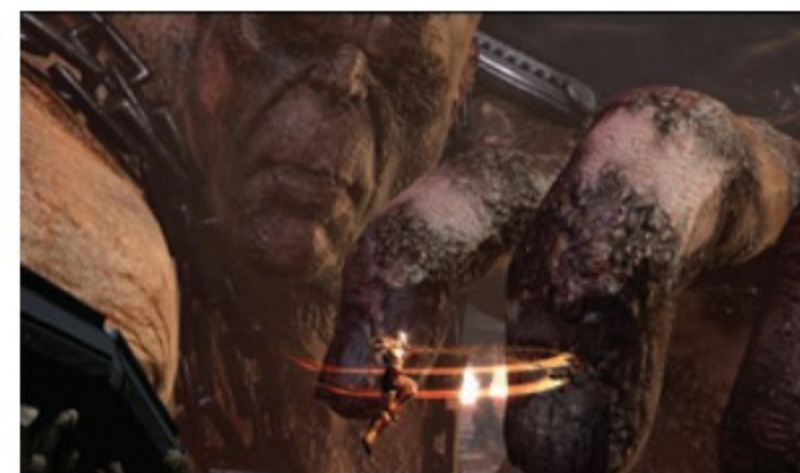
PS2 • 2001

Gran Turismo 3 cemented the sim racing blueprint with enticing graphics, deep gameplay, and an exhaustive career structure built around the cars in your garage.

120 DISHONORED

PS3, 360, PC • 2012

Dishonored reinvigorated stealth games by putting you in control of an assassin equally adept at using his supernatural abilities for balletic murder sprees as he was sneaking through the shadows. Arkane's immersive sim allowed you to excel no matter which course of action you chose, and factored your degree of bloodshed into the narrative outcome. The game also introduced us to one of the most richly detailed and fully realized fictional universes in video games.



119 GOD OF WAR III

PS3 • 2010

God of War III provided a satisfying conclusion to Kratos' bloody quest for revenge. Thanks to the move to a new generation of hardware, the scale was more epic than ever – including a jaw-dropping confrontation with the titan Cronos. Combat proved fluid and fun, allowing you to take down mythological figures in surprising (and brutal) ways – especially your final moments with Zeus. Though the series continued after this entry, God of War III marked the end of an era.

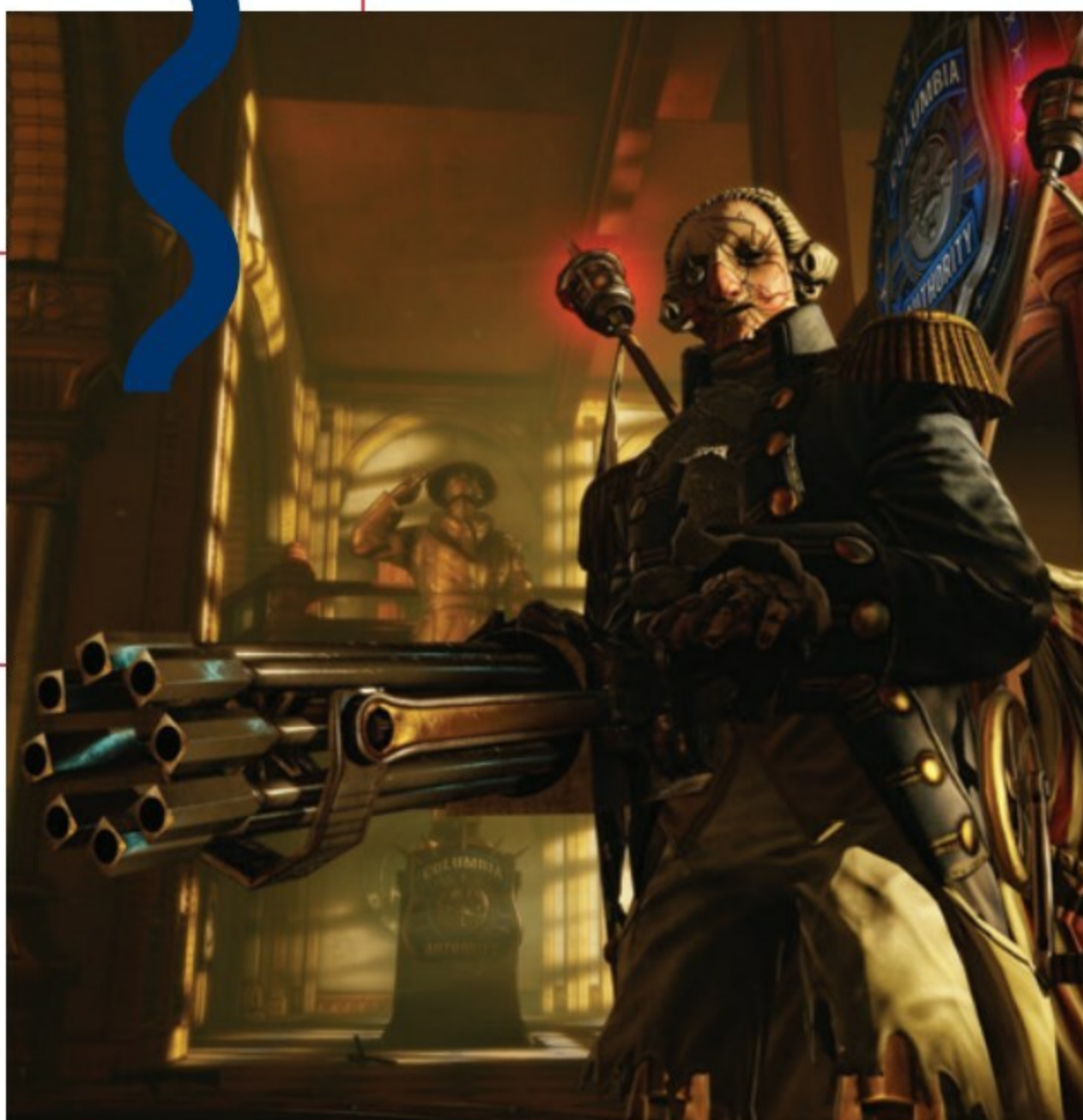
118 STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY

PC • 2010

Blizzard's sequel to the RTS classic leveraged fan-favorite characters from the original to create an excellent campaign that rose above rote resource management and unit building. Jim Raynor, Zeratul, and Kerrigan may not have a lot of depth at face value, but building a campaign around them proved a smart move. Customization features gave players some unit variety to tinker with as they played through the narrative as well.

The multiplayer brought back the units and strategies from the original game with significant quality of life improvements such as unit control and management methods, pathing, and resource collection. The resulting mode lived up the near impossible task of matching its beloved predecessor, and continues to be the platform for the best RTS esports competitions today.





117 BIOSHOCK INFINITE

PS3, 360, PC • 2013

Following up a game as revered as BioShock is a challenging feat, but Irrational Games managed to astound yet again with BioShock Infinite. With its focus on parallel realities and political themes, this shooter/RPG hybrid was nothing short of brilliant. Set in the floating city of Columbia, BioShock Infinite was brimming with 1900s-era architecture. Columbia came across like a peaceful utopia at the start, but its darker secrets and political divide became apparent as you dug deeper into the captivating story. Like its predecessors, Infinite delved into philosophy, religion, and racism in a nuanced way. These themes were all wrapped up in satisfying gameplay, mixing gunplay with creative powers to overcome enemies and introducing Elizabeth, one of the most helpful A.I. companions you'll find.



116 CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS

PS3, 360, PC • 2010

After years of playing second fiddle to Call of Duty founders Infinity Ward, Treyarch firmly stamped its mark on the series with Black Ops. The Cold War campaign co-written by David S. Goyer (*The Dark Knight*) earned renown as one of the franchise's best, but the biggest reason Black Ops ranks so high on our list is the refinement of Zombies Mode, a cooperative survival gauntlet that has since become a series staple.

115 ULTIMA ONLINE

PC • 1997

Ultima Online's sandbox elements and freedom of choice set it apart from other early MMORPGs. Acquiring your own persistent living space was revolutionary at the time, and its skill-based (rather than level-based) approach to character progression let players develop as they please. UO's unrestricted player-vs-player made the social aspects of the game that much more interesting, with player killing and villainy being major components of many a session.



114 QUAKE III ARENA

PC • 1999

Let no one ever doubt the boldness of id Software. After two single-player focused shooters in the series, the studio released Quake III, a multiplayer-centric title that offered only an arcade mode against bots as its single-player component. While this might not sound so rare now, in 1999 it was unusual. The gambit paid off, with Quake III becoming a foundational title in the realm of esports as well as a pioneer in online-focused first-person shooters. Though id would return to single-player with Quake IV, Arena is still the champion of the series. The game maintains a dedicated community thanks to its various iterations, including the popular free-to-play version called Quake Live, with Quake tournaments offering thousands of dollars in prize money.

113 METROID PRIME

GameCube • 2002

Nintendo previously demonstrated characters like Link and Mario could successfully make the leap to 3D, so it wasn't surprising in retrospect that Samus followed suit. The bigger revelation was that Retro Studios morphed the key elements of the series – exploration and combat – into a first-person perspective through the visor of the legendary bounty hunter. The result was both faithful and innovative, and Prime served as a springboard to a new era of Metroid games.



112 UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES

PS3 • 2009

The original Uncharted introduced the charismatic Nathan Drake and his daredevil stunts, but the second entry took his adventures to the next level and made him a star. Uncharted 2, which had Drake traversing Asia for a treasure related to Marco Polo, upped the ante with remarkable set pieces, stunning graphics, and great storytelling. Drake's cinematic adventure was so impressive it gave Indiana Jones a run for his money.

110 HALO 2

Xbox • 2004

When the wait for the sequel to Bungie's console defining first-person shooter reached its fever pitch, former Xbox boss Peter Moore pulled one of the greatest stunts in E3 history – revealing a tattoo with the November 9 release date on his right arm. The wait proved worth it. Yes, Halo 2's campaign had some detractors for its cliffhanger ending, but many admired the fearless decision to swap the player control between Master Chief and the Arbiter.

Halo 2's biggest success was its multiplayer migration to Xbox Live. For two years straight, it was the number one game played on Microsoft's online service, keeping gamers' attention with its well-designed maps, strong game mode suite, and playlist infrastructure that kept players jumping from one match to the next.



111 DEAD SPACE

PS3, 360, PC • 2008

After the planet-cracking mining vessel *USG Ishimura* ventured into a restricted area of space, the crew uncovered a long-buried secret that unleashed hell. Dead bodies quickly mutated into grotesque reanimated corpses. In order to survive this nightmare, systems engineer Isaac Clarke converted old mining tools into a gnarly collection of limb-slicing weapons. Visceral Games' horror show remains one of the most intense space adventures we've experienced.



109 TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

PS2, Xbox, GameCube • 2001

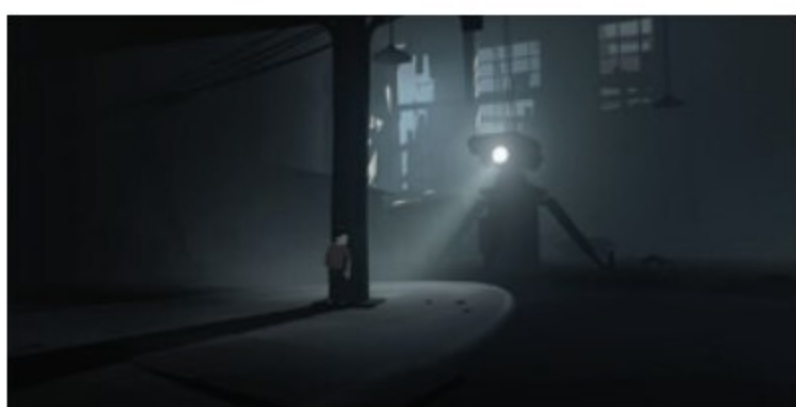
The Tony Hawk series' sweet, smooth, trick-filled gameplay took a jump with the third installment, featuring memorable levels like the airport and downtown L.A.



108 GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PS3, 360 • 2008

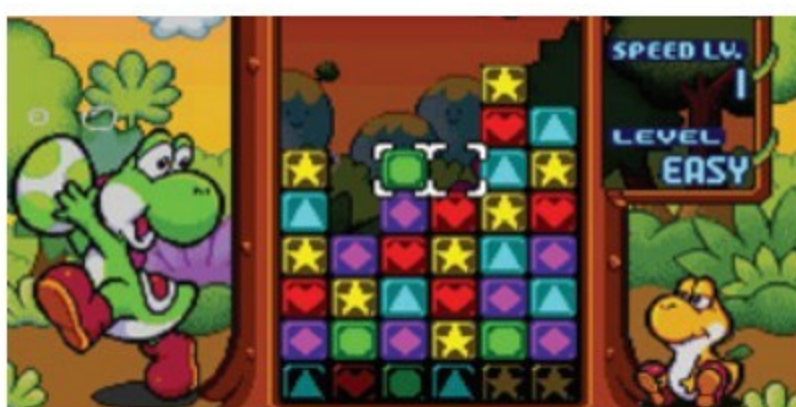
The fourth numbered entry in the seminal open world series set a new narrative standard for Rockstar with a tragic, unforgettable story of the American dream gone awry.



107 INSIDE

Xbox One, PC • 2016

Playdead's follow-up to Limbo felt like an interactive nightmare. Its strange world and puzzles were consistently compelling, and the ending left us stunned.



106 TETRIS ATTACK

SNES • 1995

This brilliant gem-swapping puzzle game lived up to its namesake by letting players set up cascading combos that threw more blocks at their opponents.

104 THE OREGON TRAIL

Apple II • 1985

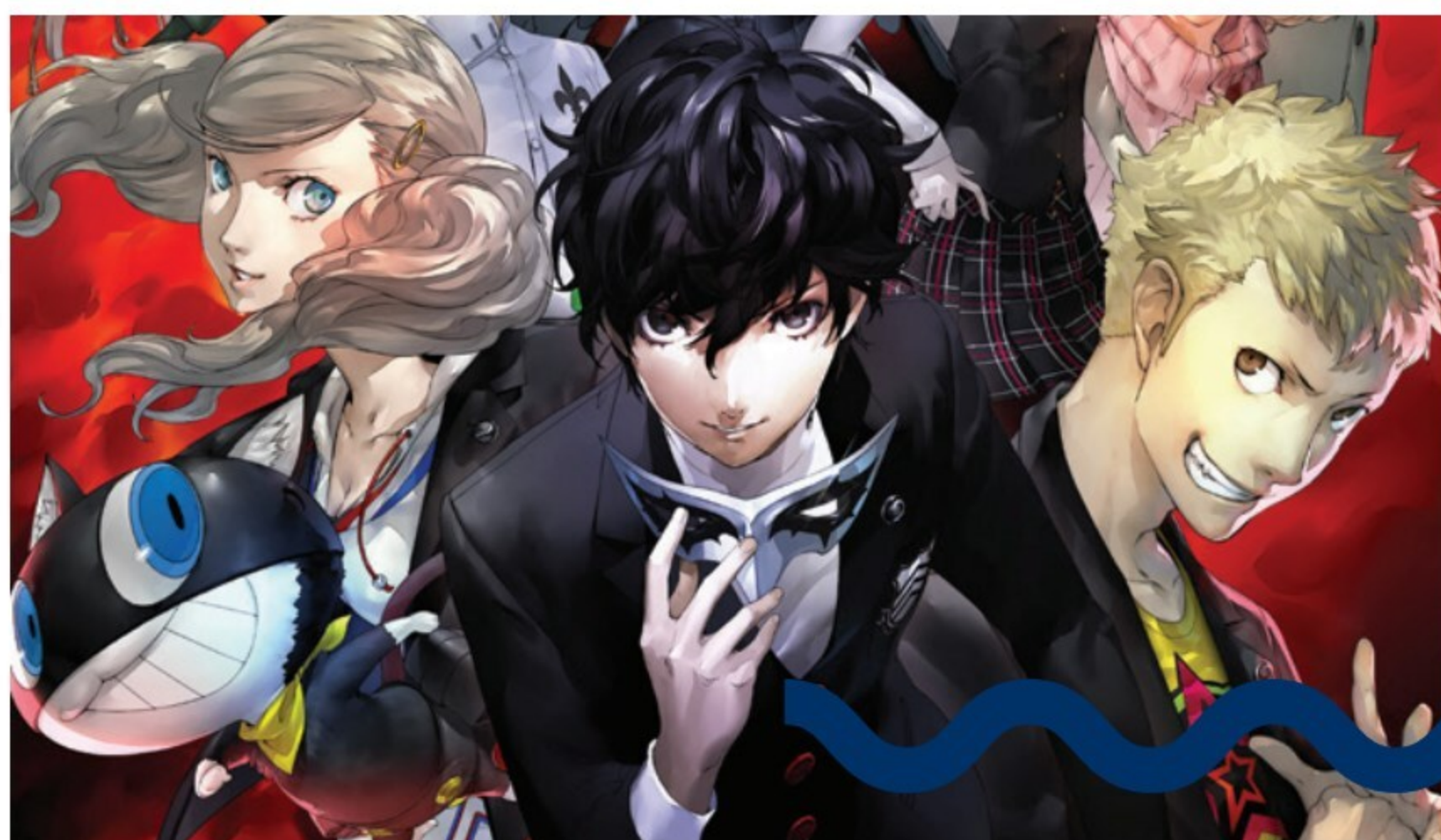
Fording a river, contracting snakebites, starving – you and your friends probably died in all these ways and more while playing The Oregon Trail. This wasn't just an entertaining simulation; MECC's revolutionary piece of educational software leveraged new technology to engage students' imaginations beyond textbooks. While the Apple II version of The Oregon Trail wasn't technically the first, it's the one most kids played as they crowded into school computer labs.



105 PERSONA 5

PS4, PS3 • 2017

All of the best Persona games have sprawling dungeons, creepy demons, and a slice of student life, but Persona 5 presented the most refined vision for these signature elements. It put players in the role of the Phantom Thieves – teenagers who fight corruption by forcing bad people to admit their wrongdoing. Your powers increased as you built bonds with the fantastic supporting cast, giving you the freedom to pursue your favorite characters and activities after class. A challenging turn-based system encouraged you to exploit enemy weaknesses to gain an edge, all while you explored bizarre metaphysical palaces based on the twisted egos of their owners. A striking visual style and infectious soundtrack accompanied the action, turning Persona 5 into a landmark RPG that mixed the routine with the remarkable.



103 HALF-LIFE

PC • 1998

A game that mixed survival-horror, first-person shooting, and puzzle-solving, Half-Life remains an astonishing work. Valve's decision to let the player experience the terrors of secretive research facility Black Mesa through the eyes of its protagonist in lieu of cutscenes or heavy text exposition allowed for an unprecedented level of immersion and sent shockwaves through the games industry still felt to this day.

102 DARK SOULS

PS3, 360 • 2011

While Demon's Souls was a niche hit, Dark Souls put the challenging dark fantasy on the radar for the rest of the gaming world. An oppressive atmosphere, larger-than-life bosses, and a huge variety of weapons to find and master created an ensemble of exploratory greatness. Few modern games offered the incredible sense of satisfaction that came after battling and defeating one of Souls' exquisitely crafted encounters.





101 STAR WARS: X-WING

PC • 1993

The arcade Star Wars may have delivered an enthralling recreation of the Death Star trench run, but no game better delivered the sensation of being in an X-Wing better than...well...X-Wing. Mowing down TIE Fighters was a true test of skill, as the player managed almost every facet of the starfighter right down to toggling power allocations. No Star Wars space simulation that followed came close to touching X-Wing's high bar, which begs the question: Where's our sequel?



099 MASS EFFECT 3

PS3, 360, PC • 2012

After a large share of rousing speeches and loyalty missions, BioWare concluded Commander Shepard's story by giving us one last high-stakes mission against the Reapers. In many ways, Mass Effect 3 was a goodbye story, celebrating Shepard as a hero and honoring the friendships we'd built with the unforgettable cast. Whether it was shooting bottles off the top of the Citadel with Garrus or sharing a tender chat with Liara regarding her time capsule project, Mass Effect 3 was full of moments that reflected on the journey we took across three games. The ending may not have been everyone's cup of tea, but the character moments shined bright. Mass Effect 3 also introduced the highly popular multiplayer mode, which gave players reason to load the game up long after the credits rolled.

100 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD

Switch, Wii U • 2017

Zelda is a beloved series that established its core mechanics early on, which is one of the reasons Breath of the Wild is such a compelling entry in the franchise. It re-examined nearly every facet of the Zelda experience to deliver one of the best open-world experiences ever created. Choosing your path and being able to climb every inch of the world created a profound and personal sense of ownership over the adventure.



098 SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2

Wii • 2010

Super Mario Galaxy 2 continued the brilliant gravity platforming its predecessor concocted, but it also brought its own unique touches to the creative level design.

097 MADDEN NFL 2004

PS2, Xbox • 2003

Madden 2004 was a sweet spot of features for the era, from the intricacies of the franchise options to the twitch gameplay epitomized by cover star Michael Vick.

096 FROGGER

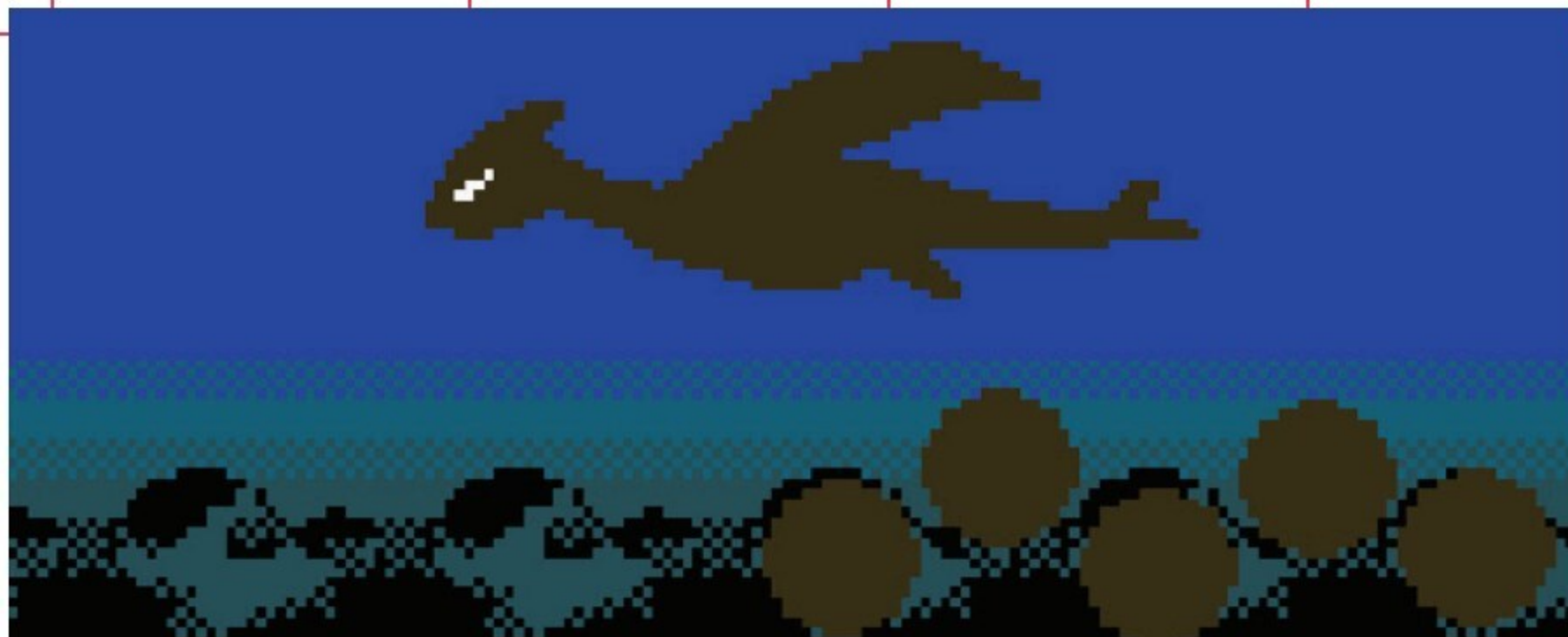
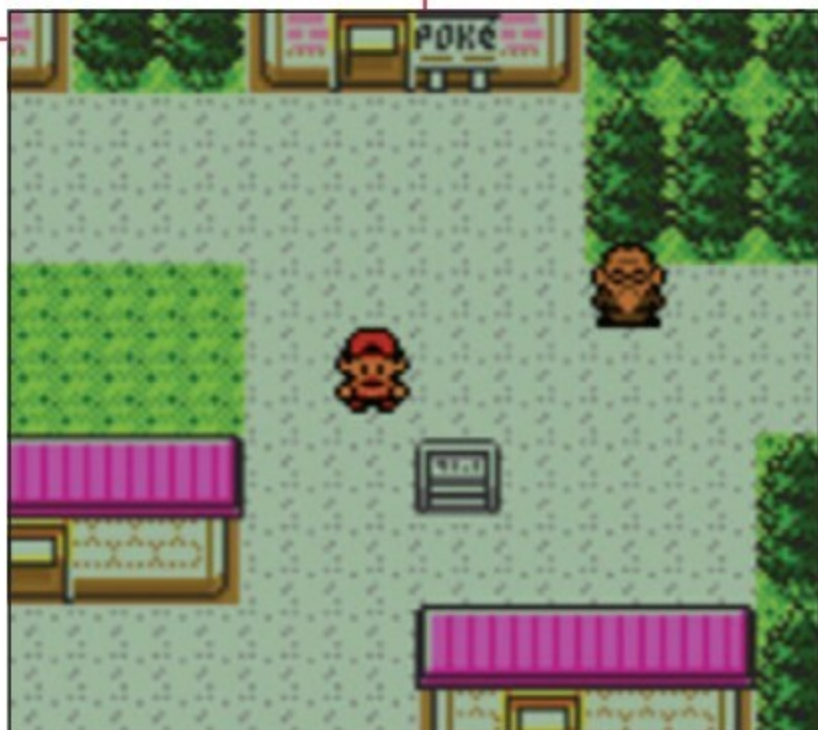
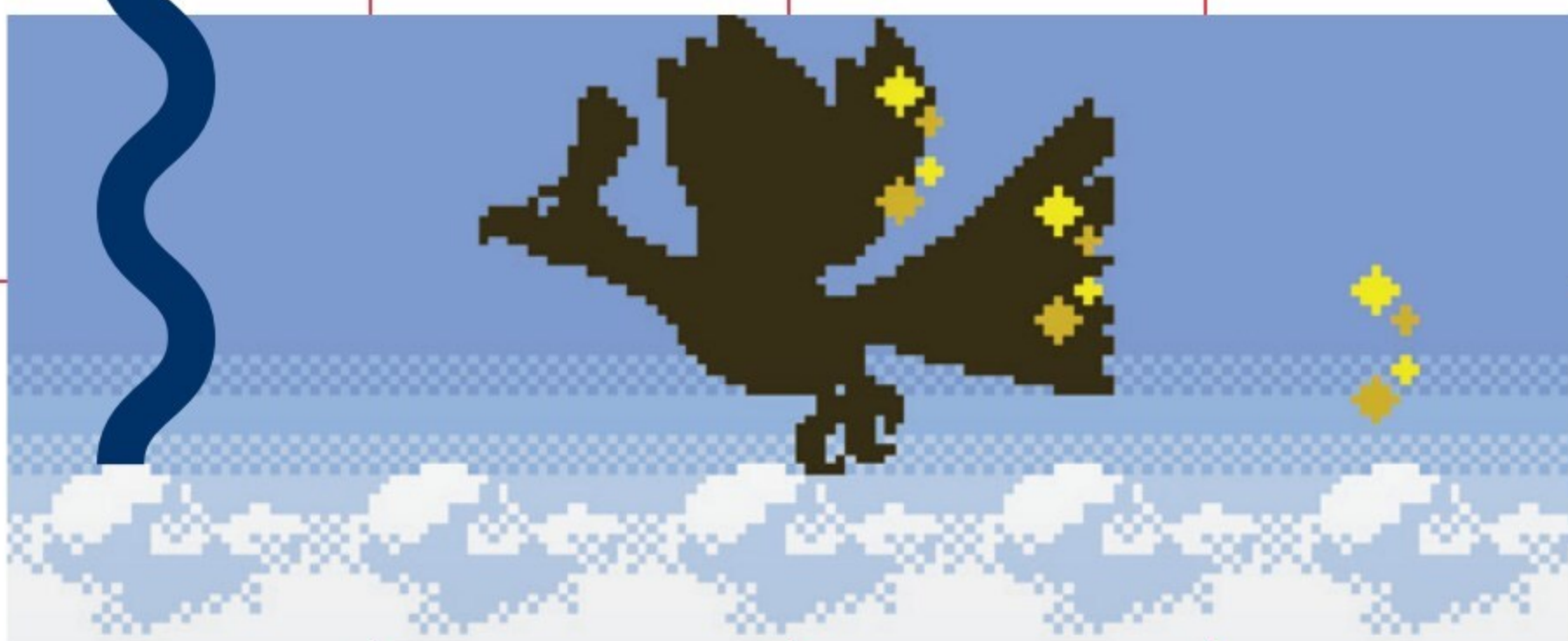
Arcade • 1981

Frogger wasn't complicated, but it required a balance of quick reflexes, careful timing, and pure luck – a quarter-eating formula that made it an iconic arcade hit.

095 DOOM II

PC • 1994

Doom delighted the masses with its bloody adventure, but Doom II united those masses with its network code and laid the groundwork for online competitive gaming.



094 POKÉMON GOLD & SILVER

Game Boy Color • 2000

After Pokémon Red and Blue took the world by storm, Game Freak refined the formula with Pokémon Gold and Silver. The sequel took players to a new region full of monsters both recognizable and unfamiliar. Supplementing your team of Pokémon from Red and Blue's Kanto region with the creatures debuting in Johto was a blast as you learned the intricacies, strengths, and weaknesses of each new creature. Taking place after the events of Pokémon Red and Blue, you not only earned badges and continued the fight against Team Rocket, but you could even visit the Kanto region after the main story. Re-earning the original badges while witnessing the passage of time in the Kanto region was thrilling, and the culmination of this adventure took place atop a mountain against the trainer you played as in Red and Blue.



093 BULLY

PS2 • 2006

A counterpoint to the gritty satire of Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto series, Bully took a more hijinks-oriented approach to open-world mayhem. As Jimmy Hopkins, players questioned authority, started fights, joined cliques, and pulled pranks – all in the interest of school harmony. With funny writing and clever objectives, Bully captured a light-hearted sense of mischief without sacrificing the importance that school and social circles carry when you're young.



092 METAL GEAR SOLID

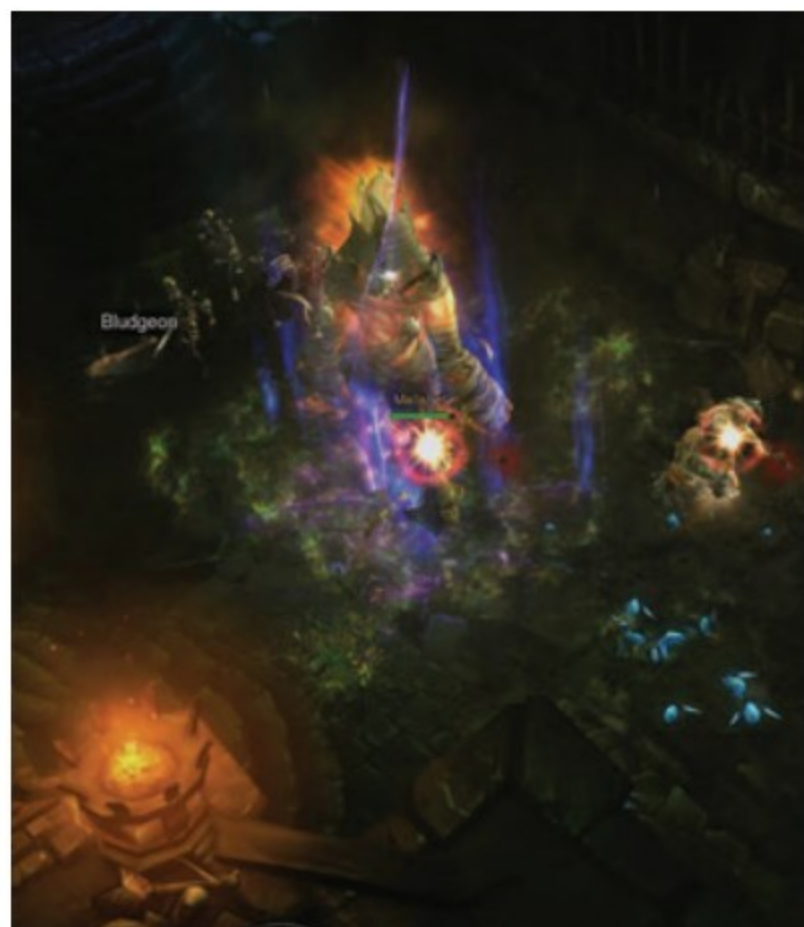
PS1 • 1998

Metal Gear Solid was such a defining title that its events – from both a story and a gameplay sense – echoed through the franchise. Snake's first adventure in 3D brought creator Hideo Kojima's ideas – from stealth gameplay to the series' story-infused cutscenes – into vivid life compared to the simplicity of the original. MGS was also notable for its boss fights (Cyborg Ninja and Sniper Wolf) and the fourth-wall-breaking Psycho Mantis encounter.

091 DIABLO III

PC, Mac • 2012

Players cried foul at Diablo III's online auction house, and you know what Blizzard did? It listened. Later updates scrapped that controversial element, added new systems and characters, and made it one of the best action-RPGs around. That support continued years after its original release, with the game eventually coming to consoles in a thoughtfully designed port. Regardless of where you played it, turning hellspawn into chunky piles of meat was an entertaining loop.

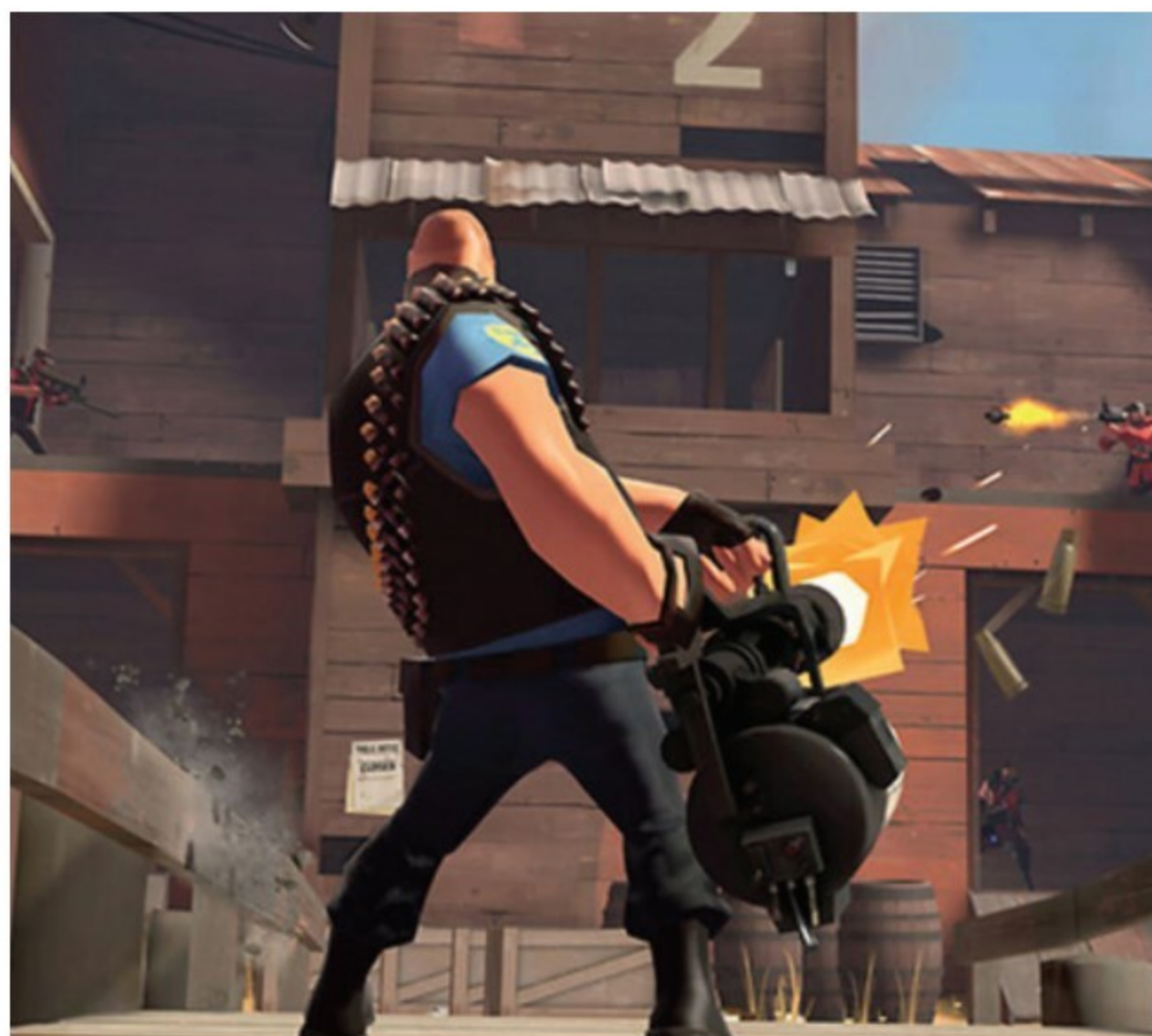


090 GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

PS2 • 2004

The final GTA released during the PS2 era was also Rockstar's most ambitious. By expanding the adventure to include three major cities (and all the rural areas in between), the studio gave players their biggest and most diverse open world to explore yet. More importantly, the game overflowed with creative and memorable missions, ranging from its early gang war focus to multi-part casino heists.

San Andreas also introduced a broader range of character customization, allowing players to fatten CJ up with repeated Cluckin' Bell value meals or turn him into a ripped action hero by pumping iron. The expansive game offered hundreds of hours of entertainment and one of the best soundtracks of all time. This powerful combination made the game a cultural phenomenon, selling tens of millions of copies to date.



089 TEAM FORTRESS 2

360, PC • 2007

Part of the Orange Box, Valve's sequel to the popular Half-Life mod updated the team-based class shooter for a new era. The makeover preserved the creative class structure from the original, but injected stylish graphics and serious flavor into every nook and cranny. More importantly, Valve has continued to deliver free updates and content patches for more than a decade, giving the community a reason to stick around.

088 KINGDOM HEARTS II

PS2 • 2006

After the first game proved the Disney/Final Fantasy crossover was feasible, Kingdom Hearts II improved on its predecessor with flashier combat and crazy plot twists. Sora's quest to find his friends was both touching and surprising, while new mechanics like the drive gauge transformations added much-needed variety to battles. Throw in clever worlds based on Tron and classic Disney shorts, and you had a fantastic sequel that helped build a passionate fan base.



087 EARTHBOUND

SNES • 1994

EarthBound was one of the strangest Nintendo JRPGs around, and that's far from a bad thing. By breaking the fourth wall, parodying the genre, and introducing a clever autofight option, it proved ahead of its time. Entertainment never ceased as you battled bizarre enemies like angry trees or hippies, and used weird powers like praying or reducing foes to uncontrollable crying messes. Though EarthBound wasn't a hit at release, it has since accumulated a cult following.



086 PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

PC • 1999

A critical darling in its day, Planescape has only gained appreciation as the years have worn on. This unique narrative-driven RPG, set in the D&D multiverse, has held sway over players who love interactive stories for years thanks to its setting and remarkable protagonist, The Nameless One. A recent HD release helped make Planescape's age show a little less, presenting the perfect opportunity to dive in if you want to see what all the (earned) fuss is about.

085 ROCK BAND 2

PS3, 360 • 2008

The peripheral music game craze hit its peak with Rock Band 2, as house parties across the world inevitably broke out the plastic instruments, singing and playing along to favorite tunes. Guitar, bass, drums, and vocals offered numerous skills to master, and a growing library of songs kept excitement high from one week to the next. More genre entries would come, but it was in this moment that Harmonix most fully realized its mission to bring the joy of music-making to everyone.



084 THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

Xbox, PC • 2002

Later entries may have smoothed out its rough edges, but many argue Morrowind was The Elder Scrolls at its most pure. Vvardenfell was a wondrous place to explore, with mushrooms and giant bugs that stretched far into the skies, and a host of threats much closer to the ground. It invited exploration, rewarding those who were clever or strong enough to venture deep into the wilds, while punishing players whose ambitions outclassed their abilities. Before the days of aggressive level scaling, Morrowind delivered a sensation that you were on the verge of being somewhere you didn't belong — a sensation reinforced by its storyline. Yes, you were an outlander, but after spending several dozen hours wandering its ashlands, caves, and forests, it understandably started to feel a lot like home.



083 SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

PS2 • 2005

At a time when video games were still trying to prove themselves as a legitimate medium of artistic expression, creator Fumito Ueda released this epic follow-up to the undeniably touching Ico. As Wander, players took on the seemingly impossible task of felling 16 giants in order to save Mono. By genre classification, Shadow of the Colossus could safely be called a puzzle platformer, but the game was so much more than that. It was an adventure about loss, sacrifice, and misaligned faith in the face of impossible odds. To see Wander's story to its conclusion is to experience an unforgettable journey that any other entertainment medium would struggle to emulate. It was recently remade in its entirety for the PlayStation 4, and it is as enthralling today as it was in 2005.



081 FALLOUT

PC • 1997

Interplay's post-apocalyptic, retro-futuristic RPG forged a franchise that's still going strong today thanks to its humor, style, and inventive character development.



080 FINAL FANTASY VII

PS1 • 1997

Cloud's quest to stop Sephiroth raised the bar for all RPGs that followed. It amazed in every category, from story to cinematic presentation to turn-based battles.

082 ANIMAL CROSSING

GameCube • 2001

Nintendo's lifestyle sim was difficult to categorize. There weren't many outlined goals aside from repaying a debt on your home in a new town. Once Tom Nook was sated, you were free to explore the animal-filled world at your own pace. Did you while away the hours fishing or collecting fossils? Maybe you became a K.K. Slider fan? Perhaps you built up your library of playable NES classics? It offered a relaxing, objective-free time later entries couldn't quite match.



079 JOURNEY

PS3 • 2012

An endless desert, a distant mountain, and a lone cloaked figure; Journey began with simplicity, and took its players full circle on a hero's journey back to the beginning. The developers at thatgamecompany brilliantly made a simple climb up a mountain into an affecting story without ever saying a word. Every new "level" offered its own strange twist, delighting players with small moments of wonder. Its indirect method of introducing two-person cooperative play was surprising and exciting. Through breathtaking music and equally beautiful vistas, Journey presented a quiet contemplation of loneliness and loss, and said something powerful about the way that just a single companion can change the way you see the world and its challenges.





078 BORDERLANDS 2

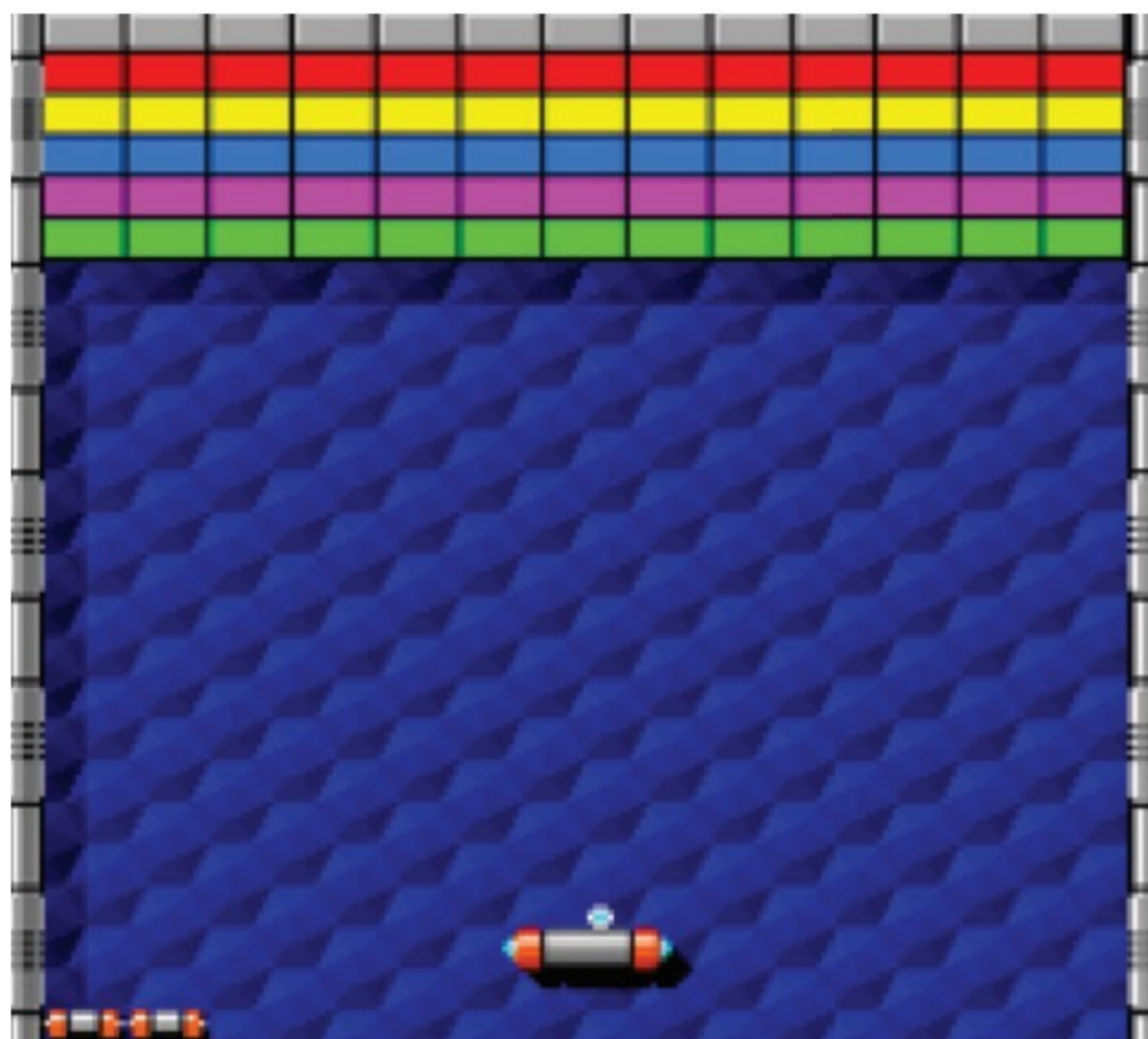
PS3, 360, PC • 2012

Borderlands 2 stuck to the “millions of guns” philosophy established by its forefather, but delivered a far more entertaining lootfest thanks in part to more dynamic character classes. The core campaign was filled with good laughs, nicely designed environments, and plenty of reasons to come back to play with friends cooperatively. Gearbox backed the game with an impressive amount of DLC, most of which made the game better.

077 ARKANOID

Arcade • 1986

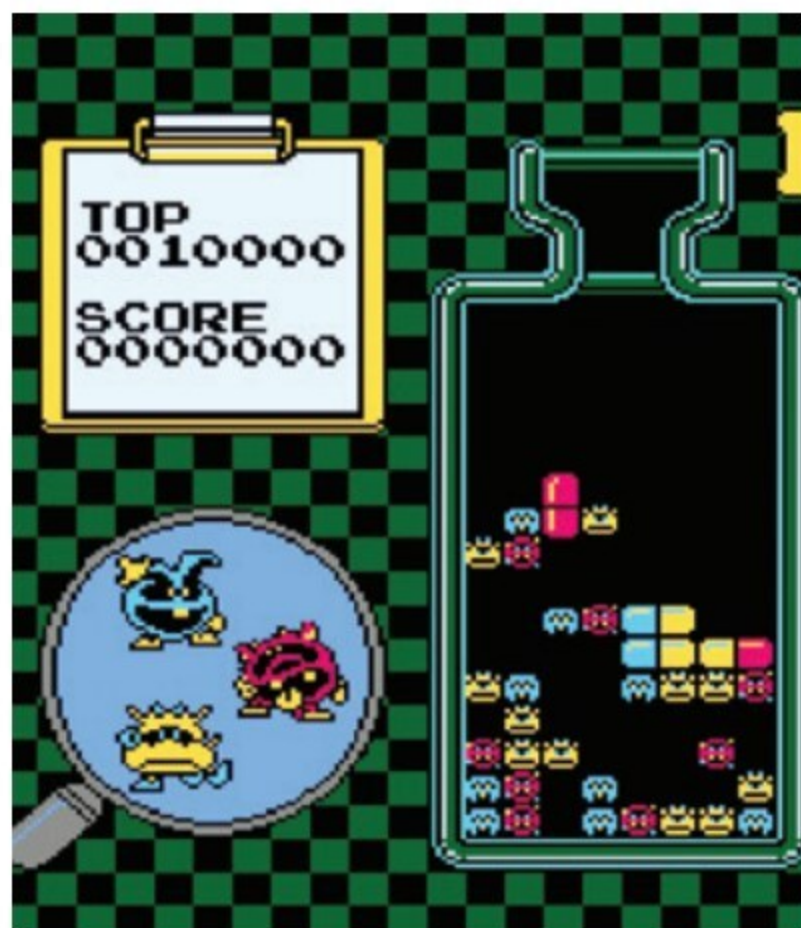
Taito took Breakout’s ball, ran with it, and never looked back. Arkanoid owes a significant debt to Atari’s block-breaking original, but let’s face facts: It’s better by every possible measure. Clearing the playfield was a tantalizing experience, whether you blasted bricks with your paddle-mounted lasers, strategically aimed your shots with a sticky paddle, or simply overwhelmed the field (and possibly yourself) with a screen-filling deluge of balls.



076 DR. MARIO

NES • 1990

We would never entrust our well-being to “Dr.” Mario, but his pill-chucking, virus-crushing approach to healthcare was still a ton of fun. Dr. Mario’s cascading combos were unlike anything in the puzzle genre, and despite featuring only a handful of themes, its chiptune soundtrack stands with the best of them. Whether you were tackling the increasingly difficult stages alone or competing against a friend, Dr. Mario was guaranteed to cure your boredom.



075 ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

PS3, 360 • 2010

Ezio is the series’ greatest Assassin, and Brotherhood saw him at his best as he masterminded a network of operatives across Europe. Rome flourished as players explored and liberated the map from the oppressive Borgia towers – a gameplay loop the series carried over in subsequent entries. The game also featured fluid combat that ebbed and flowed between attacks and counters.

074 FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

PS1 • 1997

Squaresoft’s spiritual successor to Tactics Ogre was a surprisingly deep tactical masterpiece. Players controlled a young noble trying to find his way in the world as several outside forces battled over a political power vacuum. Positioning units on Tactics’ tiny battlefields required chess-like strategy. Fortunately, each unit could cross-train in a variety of different jobs and then mix-and-match different skills to become the ultimate battle-hardened mercenary.



073 **BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2**

PS3, 360, PC • 2010

Bad Company 2 set a new standard for modern Battlefield games thanks to its strong campaign (a series first), addictive rush mode, and well-designed maps.

072 **SIM CITY 2000**

Mac • 1993

Only Will Wright could make city planning so entertaining, merging easy-to-use world-building tools with the behavioral A.I. of its inhabitants, foreshadowing the Sims.

071 **BRAID**

360 • 2008

The indie game scene was active before Braid, but this game broke through to show the mainstream the artistry and design skill that a small developer could express.

070 **XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN**

PS3, 360, PC • 2012

Rebuffing these overpowered alien invasions required a series of nail-biting tactical decision. Firaxis' revival of the '90s classic remains a strategy benchmark.



069 **SUPER MARIO 64**

N64 • 1996

If you were a gamer before the Nintendo 64, you likely remember the first time you saw Super Mario 64 in action. Seeing Nintendo's iconic mascot pop out of that warp pipe in 3D was mind-blowing at the time. Nintendo nailed the simple act of running and jumping in a three-dimensional space, as it was exciting and intuitive from the start. In allowing players to control the camera, Super Mario 64 preemptively solved one of the biggest problems many platformers faced at the time. By introducing free exploration, friendly encounters, and multiple objectives within open, sprawling environments, Super Mario 64 changed the longstanding franchise formula and showed Mario could transition from its groundbreaking 2D roots without missing a beat.



068 **GOLDENEYE 007**

N64 • 1997

It may not look (or feel) like it today, but GoldenEye 007 was one of the first successful first-person shooters on consoles. The realistic locations and weapons set it apart from sci-fi shooter ports like Doom, and the campaign perfectly captured the James Bond secret agent fantasy. For an entire generation of gamers, however, GoldenEye was more than a solid movie adaptation – it was pure multiplayer magic, providing years of riotous split-screen competition.

067 **DEUS EX**

PC • 2000

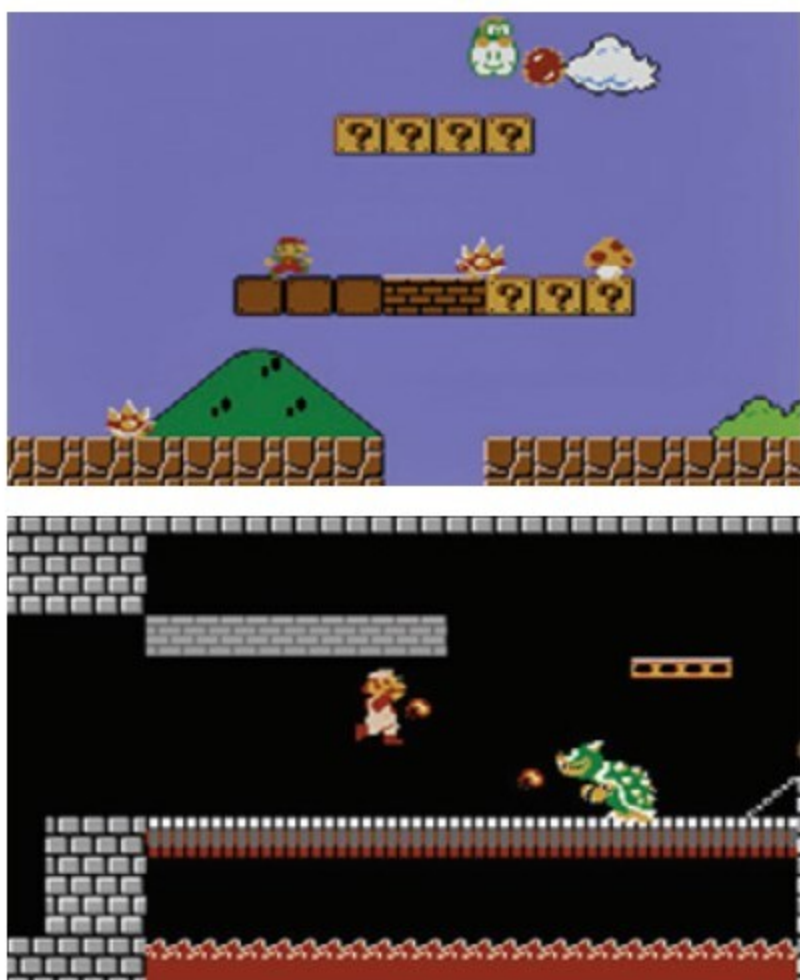
Ion Storm's cyberpunk thriller has influenced generations of games that followed. Its intriguing story, which challenged a nano-augmented agent to uncover a far-reaching corporatist conspiracy, proved games could tell mature storylines. As an early example of choice-driven gameplay, where even tiny decisions like weapon choice altered your experience, Deus Ex helped revolutionize the immersive sim genre that studios like Arkane continue to tinker with today.



066 SUPER MARIO BROS.

NES • 1985

Many credit Super Mario Bros. for saving the gaming industry after it suffered the great collapse of 1983. It carried the NES into millions of households across the world and introduced us to the Mushroom Kingdom and Bowser. Mario found his first success with Donkey Kong, but this game catapulted him to mascot superstardom. The game also holds up remarkably well, standing as a shining example of expert video game design.



065 HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

Xbox • 2001

If you've ever played a game on Xbox or any of its descendants, the experience owes a lot to Halo. Redefining expectations for first-person shooters on console, Halo introduced us to a thrilling science fiction universe, and a 30-second combat loop that still shapes our expectations for pitched battles. Whether high-fiving through the co-operative campaign or laughing along with LAN parties, Halo: Combat Evolved was the very definition of a system-seller.



064 BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN

PC • 2000

BioWare's Dungeons & Dragons RPG is the gold standard that all other computer role-playing games are measured against. The isometric layout, deep character creation, and real-time combat with the ability to pause the action delivered the true D&D fantasy like no other game had before. A captivating story, iconic opponents and creatures, and hundreds of hours of side quests for ravenous adventurers to sink their teeth into in the Forgotten Realms set an incredibly high bar for PC RPGs, a legacy that is not easily usurped. Legendary characters like the brawny Minsc and his hamster Boo, Viconia, and even Drizzt Do'Urden offered compelling interactions, and energetic voice acting added an additional layer of immersion.

063 NHL '94

SNES, Genesis • 1993

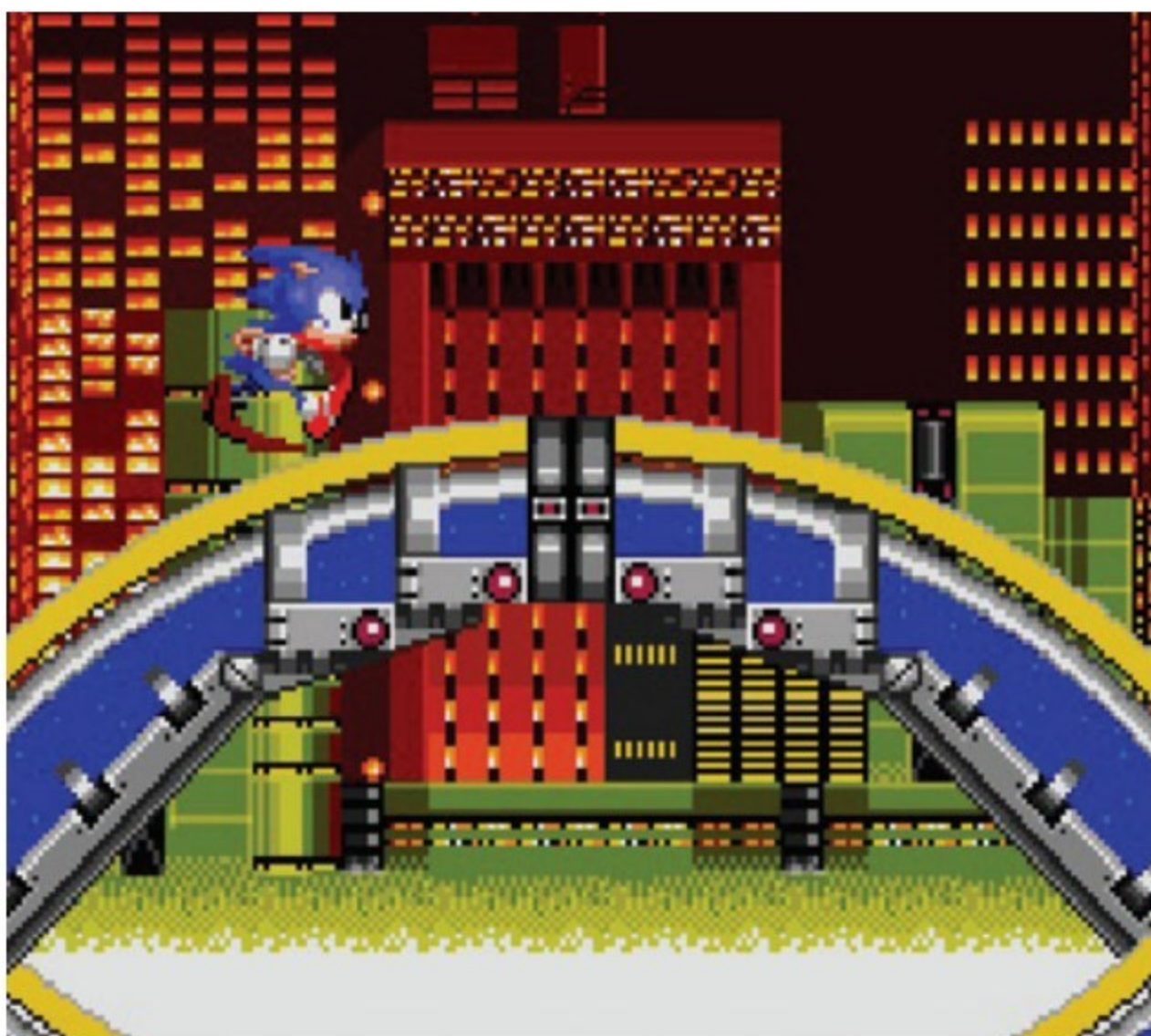
Hockey's never been the most watched sport, but for a stretch in the 1990s it was unquestionably one of the most popular video games. One of the greatest sports titles of all time, NHL '94 rose to glory thanks to its addictive versus play and introducing the game-changing one-timer. The end-to-end, pick-up-and-play action still holds up to this day, which is why EA Sports included an NHL '94 mode in NHL 14 to honor its 20th anniversary.



062 SECRET OF MANA

SNES • 1993

As an early action/RPG, this sequel to Final Fantasy Adventure left a lasting mark, helping grow the genre in the West. Secret of Mana was the first game marketed in North America with the "Mana" moniker and founded a strong legacy for the series. The heartfelt story about a young man who acquired a sword and got more than he bargained for stood out for its gorgeous visuals and memorable music. The enjoyable real-time combat, which let you pause the action with the ring-command system, kept you on your toes as you brushed up against creatively-designed baddies. As a bonus, the game also had cooperative three-player multiplayer, which was a rarity at the time. Between its battle system and cooperative elements, Secret of Mana's influence on the genre is apparent, and it still holds up as the series' high point.



061 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

Genesis • 1992

Sonic the Hedgehog threw down the gauntlet to Nintendo and the Mario franchise, and Sonic 2 proved the Blue Blur's success was more than just a fluke. The sequel was even faster than its predecessor, and featured better-designed, more polished levels. It also introduced Sonic's pal Tails and a handy new move to Sonic's arsenal: the spin dash. The result was a fantastic follow-up that is still looked at by many as the pinnacle of the franchise.

060 SYSTEM SHOCK 2

PC • 1999

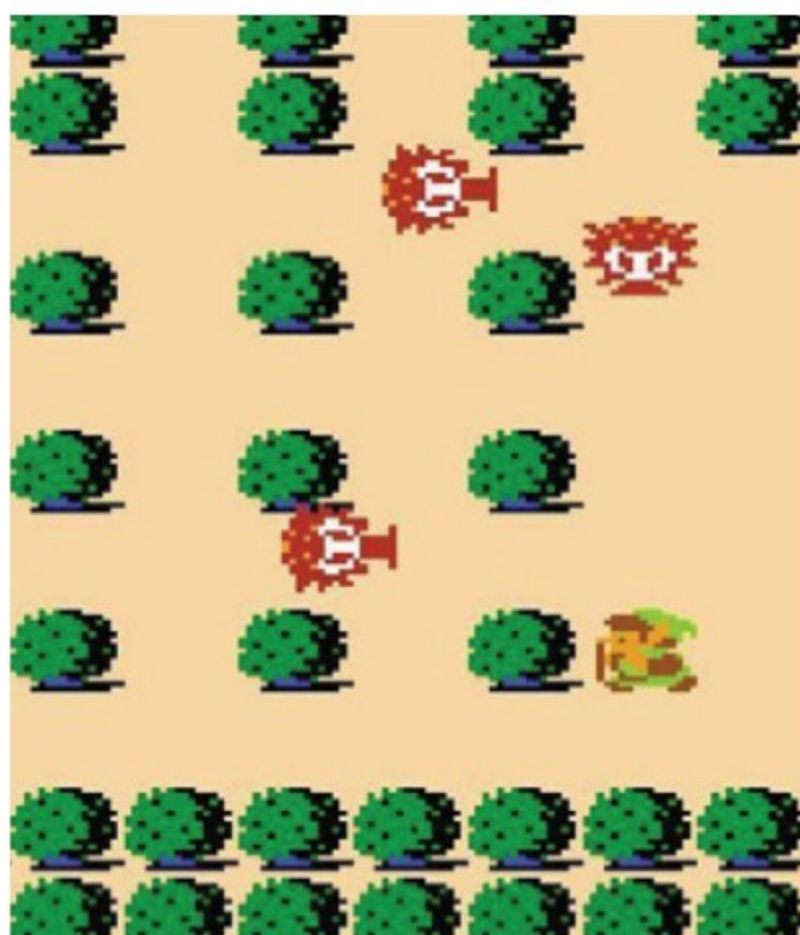
System Shock 2 is often given the short shrift as a rough draft for BioShock, but it's much more than that. Any shooter that uses RPG-lite systems, like Mass Effect and Far Cry, owes its user-tailored gameplay flexibility to this daring little game. Countless horror titles like Dead Space and Alien: Isolation have also wisely cribbed from System Shock 2's tense atmosphere and brilliant setting, an interstellar haunted house known as The Van Braun.



059 RESIDENT EVIL

PS1, Saturn • 1996

Capcom's early experiment in horror was campy and a bear to control, but it was so fresh at the time it kickstarted a survival-horror revolution. Managing a delicate supply of health packs and ammo made our journey through this zombie-filled mansion more intense than most horror games. In 2002, Capcom outdid itself with the Game-Cube remake, which turned up the scares with new zombie types, reworked puzzles, and hauntingly gorgeous visuals.



058 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

NES • 1987

Our amazement with The Legend of Zelda started well before the game appeared on screen. Cracking open the case revealed a shiny gold cartridge, a somewhat cocky, yet accurate design on Nintendo's part. Heralded for the sense of discovery it bestows upon players for exploration, puzzles, and action, The Legend of Zelda entranced with its dungeon designs and mysterious lost woods. Series staples like Link, Ganon, Hyrule, and Princess Zelda debuted in this entry.

057 METROID

NES • 1986

Few NES games nailed their atmosphere as well as Nintendo's early sci-fi adventure. Samus' exploits battling Space Pirates and parasitic alien lifeforms felt haunting and isolating thanks to otherworldly visuals and a killer score. Players could explore at their own pace as they collected unique power-ups, which led them deeper into an alien landscape. Its sequels refined these concepts, but Metroid's basic formula remains incredibly popular more than 30 years later.



056 MORTAL KOMBAT II

Arcade • 1993

The original Mortal Kombat was a phenomenon, but its sequel proved the series had legs behind all the blood. While imitators were busy figuring out the most outlandish kill moves, the team behind Mortal Kombat refined the fighting and landed at an incredible sweet spot. Yes, the kills were gorier than ever, but combos were fleshed out beyond mashing, emphasizing onslaughts that strung together special and normal moves in ways that were unheard of at the time. But the spectacle was still there, with new finishing moves and secrets for players to find as they sunk quarters into the arcade cabinet. In Mortal Kombat II, the series finally had real depth, and that lasting value is a huge part of why the series has remained while all the other gore-fests died off.



055 STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

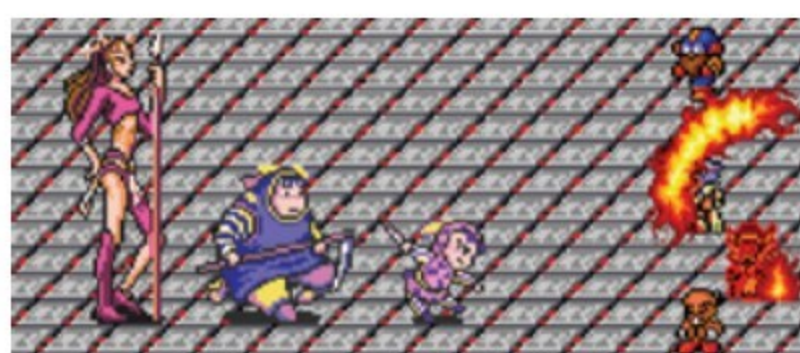
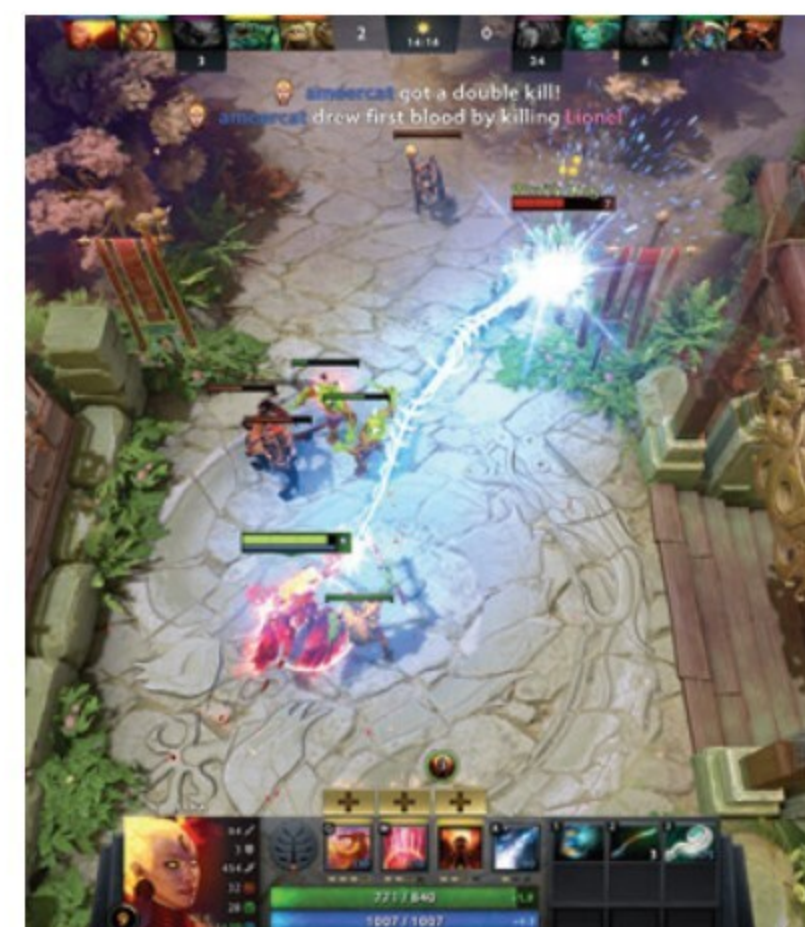
Xbox, PC • 2003

Set 4,000 years before the formation of the Galactic Empire, Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic is a turn-based RPG that explored the early days of the Jedi and Sith, and gave players an intimate look at both sides. BioWare embraced player freedom, allowing players to determine if they were going to rule the galaxy with fear as a Sith Lord or bring peace and justice as a Jedi Knight. BioWare backed the freedom of choice up with story threads that delivered a true sense of your actions mattering for the entire game. Along with wisecracking droid HK-47, the cast was brilliantly penned, allowing for deep relationships to grow. This journey was a dream come true for Star Wars fans, and is still the best game set in a galaxy far, far away.

054 DOTA 2

PC • 2013

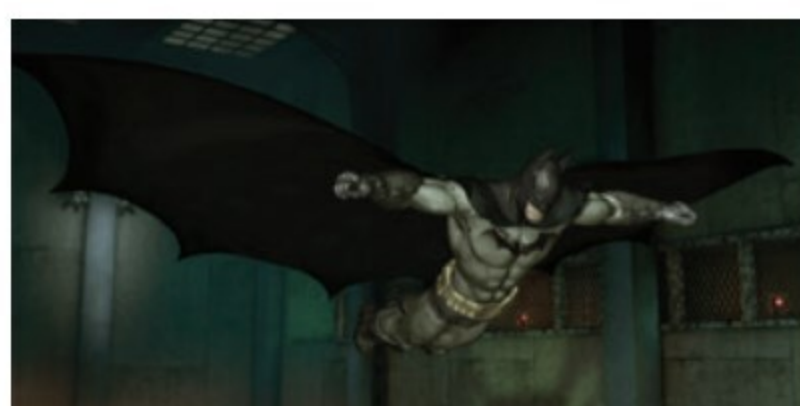
Dota 2 is likely the most complex game on this list. With more than 100 characters, dozens of item choices, and a map stuffed with hidden paths, you could play it for thousands of hours and still feel like a novice. The learning curve is steep, but the reward for toughing it out is worth it. After your first incredible victory, where a single mistake turns the tide of a fight and wrenches victory from the jaws of defeat, it might be hard to go back to anything else.



053 FINAL FANTASY IV

SNES • 1991

In an adventure filled with betrayal, redemption, romance, and magic, Final Fantasy IV (originally called Final Fantasy II in the U.S.) paved the way for fantasy storytelling on consoles.



052 BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

PS3, 360, PC • 2009

Not only did Rocksteady deliver a true representation of Batman, it turned the asylum into a spectacle, and just happened to have a great Joker story to tell.

051 GRAND THEFT AUTO III

PS2 • 2001

What can we say about Grand Theft Auto III that hasn't already been said? This is one of those monumental titles that changed video games forever. The melding of the 3D open-world sandbox with gritty crime-driven storytelling raised the stakes for video games when it came to giving players freedom. Countless clones emerged from the woodwork to ape GTA's conventions for good reason – there was nothing else like it. Later Grand Theft Auto titles would go on to build upon the framework of III to make games that were better by leaps and bounds, and GTA III is a little difficult to go back to now compared to its younger siblings. Still, it's nearly impossible to overstate the bloody footprint the game left in terms of influence on mature storytelling and open-world game design.





050 SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE

GameCube • 2001

Melee was a double-jump over its predecessor, delivering the gold standard other entries would be held to. The roster featured favorites like Mario and Ness, as well as the Fire Emblem hero Marth before that series even hit North America. Later entries added characters and stages, and also a few missteps – quite literally, in the case of Brawl's ill-fated tripping mechanic. Whether you were a casual, items-on player or a hardcore fan, Melee had something for everyone.

049 METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

PS2 • 2004

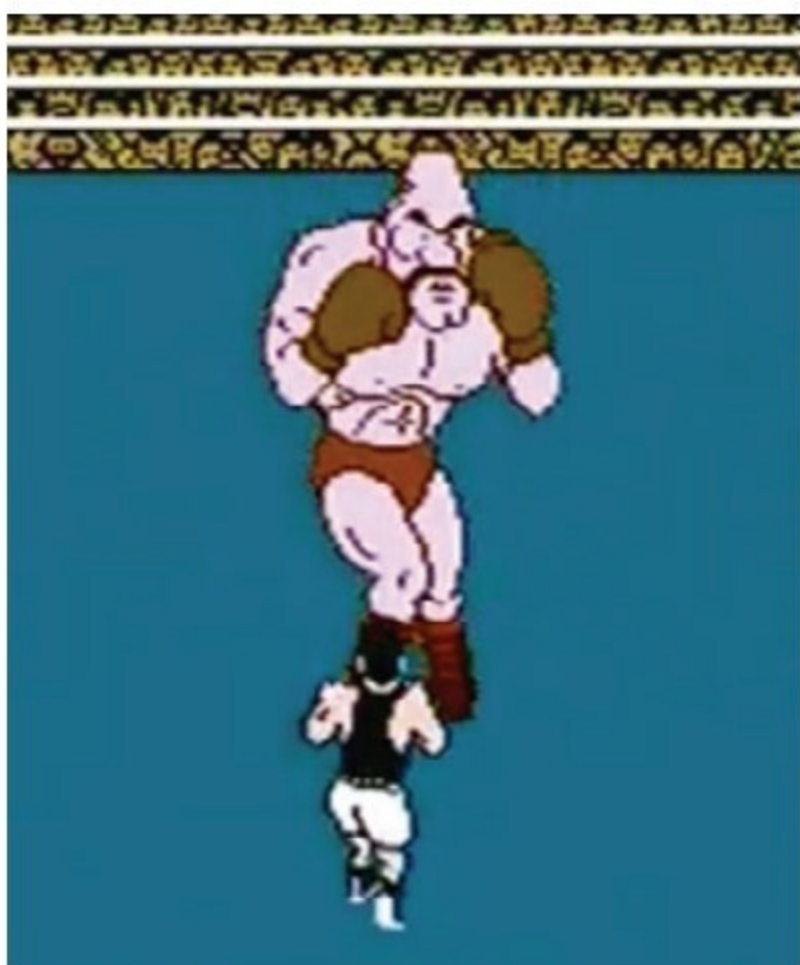
This is where Big Boss' legend began, and the jump back to the Cold War gave the series an injection of new characters and questions. It introduced The Boss, one of the most interesting and complex villains in gaming, but also made strides in stealth by emphasizing situational awareness instead of vision cones. Fun mechanics, cool story beats, and a stunning final encounter made this the best of the Metal Gear series.



048 MIKE TYSON'S PUNCH-OUT!!

NES • 1987

Punch-Out's pattern-based gameplay was perfect for boxing, featuring an elaborate sequence of dodges and counter-punches against tremendous odds and a colorful cast of characters like Soda Popinski, Bald Bull, and even Mike Tyson himself. Punch-Out's gameplay timing was tight and so definitive that for many it was the only boxing game – and maybe even sports title – worth playing.



047 CONTRA

NES • 1988

Contra taught gamers a valuable lesson: Even a full-scale alien invasion is no match for the bond between two shirtless, musclebound buddies. Contra's side-scrolling gunplay offered a new take on the shoot-'em-up genre, filled with memorable bosses and power-ups. But all the spread shot upgrades in the world can't beat having a friend at your side. Contra is the definitive co-op classic – you won't make it far playing solo. Well, unless you use the Konami code.

046 THE SIMS 2

PC, Mac • 2004

The Sims series has sold nearly 200 million copies worldwide, making it one of most successful PC franchises of all time. Playing god by controlling your sims' personal lives and careers made for an engaging sandbox game like no other. The Sims 2 was the pinnacle of this concept, with improved graphical fidelity over the original, a wide range of life stages, and attention to detail that remains unmatched in the franchise.

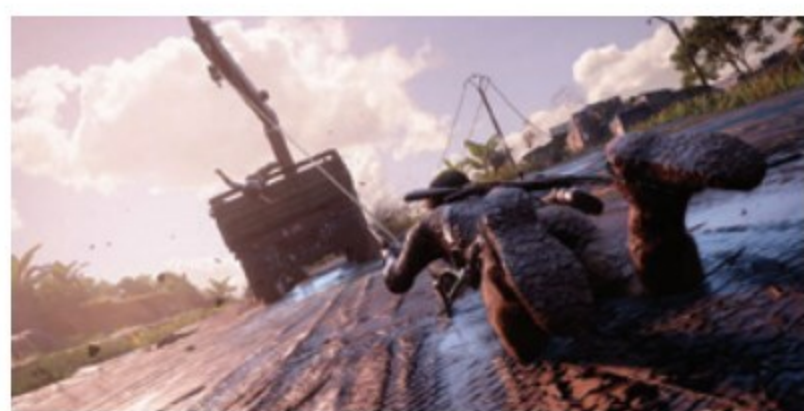




045 ROBOTRON: 2084

Arcade • 1982

The first twin-stick shooter was an unrelenting frenzy that remains just as fun more than three decades later. It kept players' hands full and their pockets empty.



044 UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END

PS4 • 2016

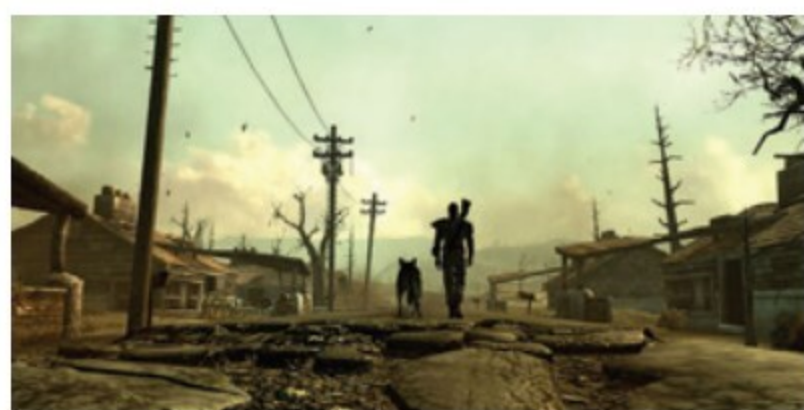
With an exciting story, well-crafted gameplay, and beloved characters growing into their own, Uncharted 4 made for a fitting end to Nathan Drake's legendary adventure.



043 CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

PS1 • 1997

Through stellar gothic styling, deep combat, and a bevy of exploration secrets, this was the release that reshaped and revived a genre.



042 FALLOUT 3

PS3, 360, PC • 2008

Bethesda brought its post-apocalyptic series into the modern era with a surprisingly alive, open world overflowing with fun activities and interesting quests.

041 NBA JAM

Arcade • 1993

You didn't have to love basketball to be enamored with NBA Jam. This defining two-on-two arcade experience from Midway gave players of all backgrounds and interests reason to crowd an arcade cabinet and dunk on their friends. Whether you were draining a three to catch on fire or draining your turbo to sprint down-court on a fast break for a high-flying slam dunk, NBA Jam was a guaranteed blast. Like the best arcade games, the gameplay still holds up to this day.



040 GOD OF WAR

PS2 • 2005

The original God of War reshaped the landscape of action games with its twisted version of Greek mythology and unapologetic embrace of violence. Kratos stood out as a flawed antihero, but swinging his flaming chain-blades is what made the adventure shine. Stylish, responsive combat against legendary foes made every battle a visual feast, and the gory execution sequences (based on timed button presses) popularized a concept that persists in game design to this day.

039 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

N64 • 1998

For a beloved series like The Legend of Zelda, major change can be dangerous. The ambitious Ocarina of Time not only expanded the scope of the franchise, but brought it to a three-dimensional plane with great success. Your first step into a sprawling Hyrule Field was revelatory. As you explored on horseback or on foot, your experience was defined by your discoveries. Dense with interesting locales, oddball characters, and enticing secrets, Ocarina of Time provided myriad reasons to do more than just head to your destination. In addition to great controls for navigation and fights, it pioneered locking onto enemies and points of interest with its Z-targeting. Ocarina of Time not only thrust the Zelda franchise into 3D, but it showed that it could do so without compromising on quality.





038 STARCRRAFT

PC • 1998

Blizzard's expertly balanced RTS brought tactical gameplay to the forefront and established one of the world's most robust pro-gaming circuits.



037 POKÉMON RED & BLUE

Game Boy • 1998

Pokémon is a massive international phenomenon, and it all started with these primary color entries. We met Pikachu and captured our first pocket monster right here.

035 SUPER MARIO KART

SNES • 1992

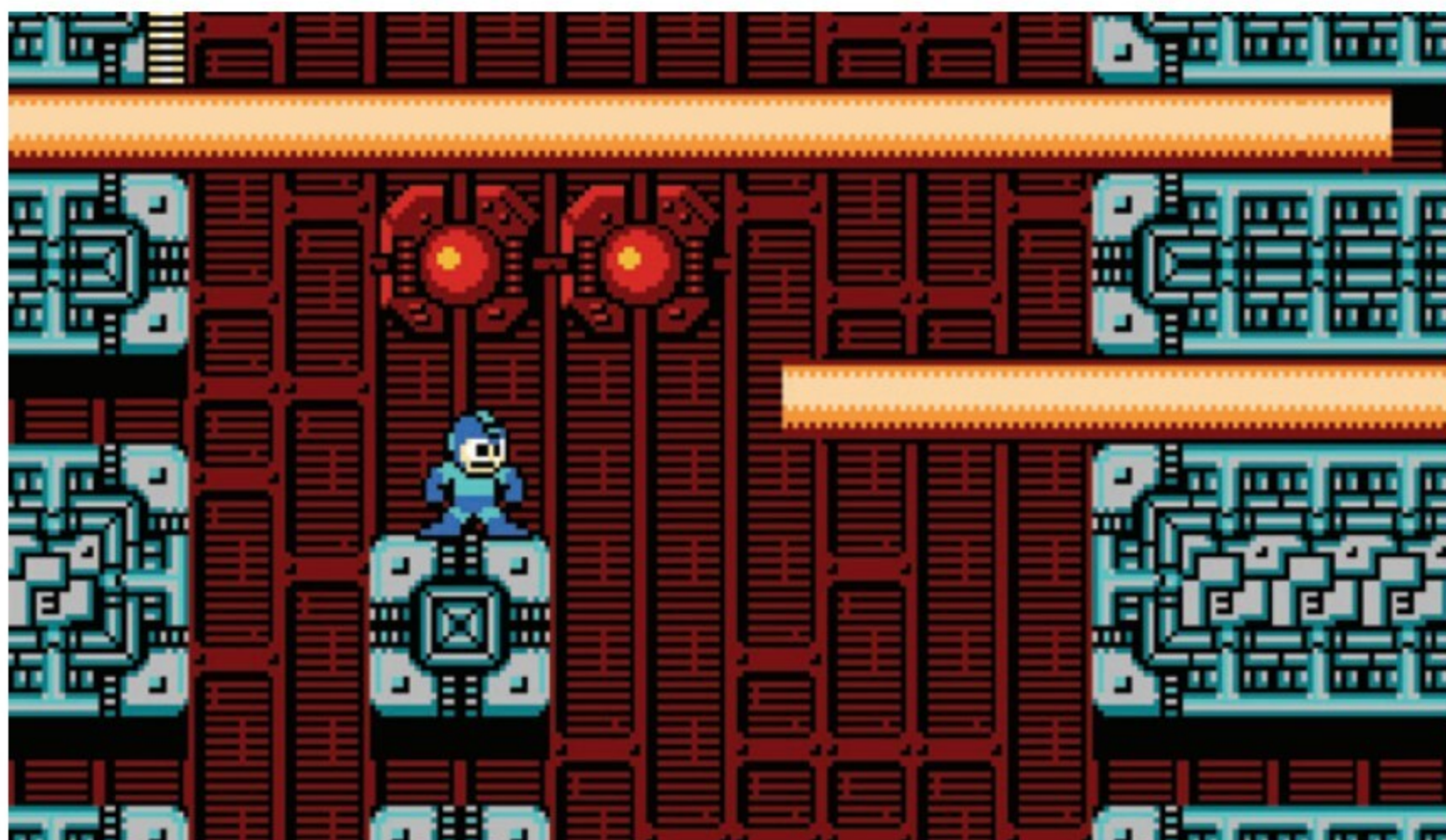
Go-karts have had a disproportionately large imprint on the gaming industry, and Super Mario Kart is the reason why. Nintendo's cartoony take on the racing genre offered just the right mix of skill-based gameplay and pick-up-and-play fun. The addition of rival-thwarting power-ups provided an enticing competitive wrinkle to races, and made Battle Mode a destination for multiplayer competition. Mario Kart remains a staple series for Nintendo, and it's easy to see why.



036 MEGA MAN 2

NES • 1989

All Mega Man games used the same basic formula: Fight robots, get new weapons, and use those weapons to fight more robots. Even so, something about Mega Man 2 felt magical, elevating it above its peers. Maybe it was the cool robot masters like Crash Man, devised before the well of unique enemy ideas began to run dry. Maybe it was cool abilities like the versatile Metal Blade and situational Time Stopper. Maybe it was the unforgiving Quick Man stage, honing our reflexes with razor-thin margins for error. Maybe it was the catchy soundtrack, which has been remixed countless times over the years. Whether it was one of these elements or the intersection of them all, Mega Man 2 became an undeniable classic and set the stage for the franchise's future with pitch-perfect action and difficult-but-fair design.



034 RESIDENT EVIL 4

GameCube • 2005

Resident Evil 4 wasn't just the reinvention the survival-horror series needed. Thanks to smart over-the-shoulder gunplay, it was also the first great third-person shooter. Resident Evil's switch to a more action-focused experience excelled thanks to its focus on environmental objects you could use in a pinch, like barricading doors, as well as smartly-designed quick-time-event boss fights. Ghoulis charms and haunting encounters, like the standoff with the villagers at the beginning, helped preserve the series' horror roots. Even years later, the Spanish castle is still a compelling and creepy fortress to navigate. Games like Gears of War and Uncharted would eventually carry the third-person shooter genre forward, but Resident Evil 4 felt like a revolution for the time.

033 DONKEY KONG

Arcade • 1981

Before plumbing and Princess Peach, there was carpentry and Pauline. Mario would eventually go on to save worlds and galaxies (while saving time for activities like tennis and kart racing), but it all started at a humble construction site. The game proved to be more than a fleeting fad, with a dedicated group of score-chasers continuing to see who could jump, climb ladders, and eventually ascend to the all-time leaderboards, as captured in the documentary *The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters*.



032 BLOODBORNE

PS4 • 2015

Hidetaka Miyazaki and From Software found something incredible by melding an aggressive take on Souls-style combat with two different flavors of rich, atmospheric horror. The adventure that began with traditional Victorian ghouls and werewolves took a mind-bending turn into cosmic Lovecraftian madness that pulled the tale into the darkest reaches of the imagination. The underlying aspects that made the Souls games amazing were at their peak here, with incredible boss battles, stellar music, and environments ripped from surreal nightmares. Not only was Bloodborne an incredible action/RPG, it was also one of the best horror experiences to grace the world of gaming, an ichor-drenched dreamscape that lingers years after the final stylish slash was dealt.



031 BATTLEFIELD 2

PC • 2005

The third entry of the landmark shooter franchise adopted a modern setting and took the competitive multiplayer action to new heights thanks to a deep progression system, unlockable weapons, and a refined squad system that still serves as the teamwork focused foundation for the series today. DICE also introduced a built-in game recorder that let players capture the remarkable, off-the-cuff “Battlefield moments” the emergent gameplay frequently produced.

030 PORTAL

360, PC • 2007

The release of The Orange Box brought fans of Half-Life and Team Fortress together to celebrate Valve’s catalog. Snuck between those two massive series was Portal, a surprising new title comprised of mind-bending puzzles. Portal dropped players into tricky test chambers driven by a devious and hilarious A.I. On top of GLaDOS’ puzzles was a compelling tale that subverted the basic premise and tied into the Half-Life universe.



029 ASSASSIN'S CREED II

PS3, 360 • 2009

Ezio Auditore da Firenze stepped into the tremendous upheaval of the Italian Renaissance and became the signature hero of Assassin's Creed, cementing the franchise as a mainstay in the video game landscape. Beyond its breathtaking visuals and historical setting, this second installment nailed the sense of power players wanted, setting us loose across the rooftops of Venice and Florence, and diving down onto foes like eagles on the hunt.



028 GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

PS2 • 2002

When it comes to period pieces in video games, no studio does them better than Rockstar Games. Vice City transported players to the 1980s and a neon-lit Miami overrun with gangsters, drugs, and terrible haircuts. Through protagonist Tommy Vercetti, the pursuit of power was expertly told. Recklessly driving a sports car as Mr. Mister's "Broken Wings" played was the definition of why Vice City was (and still is) awesome.

027 LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

PC • 2009

The multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) was the stuff of mods and maps for ages, but Riot Games' League of Legends brought the team-oriented successor to the RTS into the mainstream and changed gaming forever. A cast of colorful characters defined by kits of special skills and tide-turning ultimate abilities allowed players get attached to play styles and personalities. LoL has changed significantly over the years, but it's still amazing.



026 SUPER MARIO WORLD

SNES • 1991

In 1991, Nintendo once again left it to Mario to sell gamers on an expensive new console, and boy did he ever. Super Mario World built on the sheer hysteria of Super Mario Bros. 3 by making the jump to the 16-bit era. Massively improved graphics, more complex levels, and a plethora of new enemies, items, and secrets made Super Mario World the biggest and most ambitious entry yet – and it came less than two years after the release of its predecessor. Super Mario World featured a whopping 96 levels, culminating in the secret Star World and Special World stages that tested the mettle of even the most veteran platforming experts. Super Mario World also introduced Mario's loveable sidekick Yoshi, who quickly became the star of his own puzzle and platform games. Not a bad way to kick off the Super Nintendo.



025 THE LAST OF US

PS3 • 2013

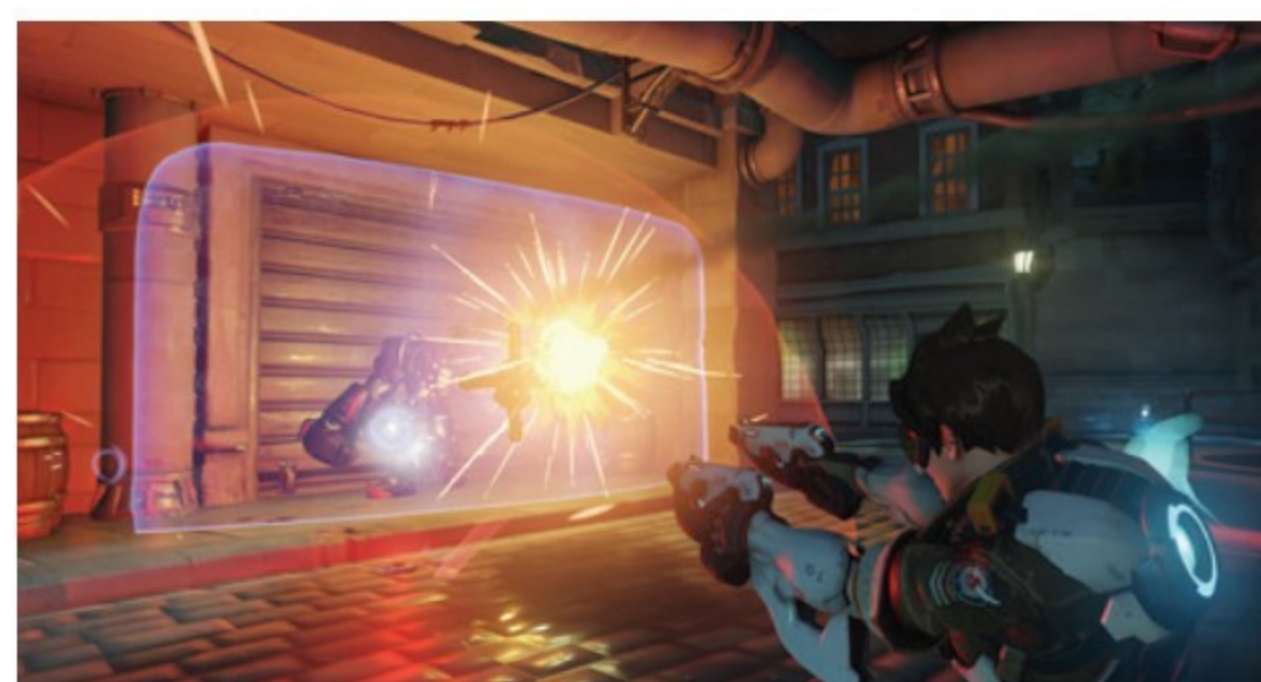
Developer Naughty Dog saw the PlayStation 3 out in style with this gritty take on the zombie apocalypse featuring brutally intimate combat and a complicated relationship between its unlikely heroes. Joel and Ellie's journey across the country explored survivors' desperation, guilt, and conflicting motives, and was anchored by Naughty Dog's beautifully destroyed world, tremendous voice acting, and an absorbing story penned by Neil Druckmann. The lurid stealth kills and horror tension put players on the edge of survival, further exposing the dire stakes at hand. The Last of Us has cemented itself with gamers, becoming more than just another gory post-apocalyptic zombie title. Instead, it deftly drew on our fears and emotions to deliver a world we never wanted to see but felt all too real.



024 CIVILIZATION IV

PC • 2005

The highest note in a franchise of incredible 4X (explore, expand, exploit, exterminate) games, Civilization IV let players embrace the fantasy of nation building through a vast variety of methods and approaches. Whether you wanted to win through cultural influence, the space race, or the classic conquering wheels of war, the options presented were enjoyable and interesting to explore at each and every turn, with the next game right around the corner.



023 OVERWATCH

PS4, Xbox One, PC • 2016

Blizzard's hero-based multiplayer shooter hit on all the right notes for millions of players when it launched. Whether you were defending a control point or escorting a payload, a strong sense of team composition and collaboration is necessary. Blizzard not only created a supremely balanced shooter that breached the mainstream consciousness, but it has continually provided new updates and events, giving players ample reasons to come back for more.



022 GALAGA

Arcade • 1981

This arcade sequel either refined Galaxian's pew-pew space shooting or made it overly casual, depending on your perspective. Decades later, fierce debate still rages online as to which was the better game. Galaxian established the wave-based shooter, but Galaga made it fun – a critical factor when 25 cents is at stake. It's true that Galaxian required better timing, in large part because only one of your ship's bullets could be on screen at a time. That said, there was something irresistible about Galaga's ingenious risk-reward opportunity. You could allow your ship to get captured by an enemy's tractor beam and then rescue it with a well-placed shot. At that point, your firepower was doubled, as the liberated ship docked next to your other ship and fired simultaneously. Those aliens never stood a chance.



021 HALF-LIFE 2

PC • 2004

Valve was formed by a bunch of numbers geeks from Microsoft, but the developer quickly proved it had the knack for making great games with the release of Half-Life. After that, the studio outdid itself (and the rest of the industry) with the sequel. Half-Life 2 followed Gordon Freeman as he emerged into a world subjected by the technologically superior, multidimensional empire known as the Combine. Valve's signature level of polish filtered down into everything from the gunplay to the wild variety of gameplay mechanics that kept the action fresh. Gordon was the classic silent protagonist, but his supporting cast felt like meaningful companions. Meanwhile, the inventive Gravity Gun made excellent use of Valve's hyper-realistic physics system. If Valve ever gets around to making a third entry, it has a lot to live up to.



020 SUPER METROID

SNES • 1994

We had no idea what was in store for us when Samus first set foot on the planet Zebes. Nintendo took the free-form exploration elements from the original Metroid and refined them until it created a pitch-perfect experience that other developers have been chasing for almost a quarter century.

After space pirates stole the last remaining Metroid and began creating a deadly biologic weapon, Samus traveled to their remote base on the planet Zebes to save the deadly parasitic jellyfish. Unlike most games of the era, Super Metroid excelled at non-verbal environmental storytelling. As Samus explored the hostile, alien planet, she encountered acid rain drenched cliffs, caverns teeming with carnivorous foliage, and crashed ships that belonged to mysterious ancient civilizations. Attentive players could even pick up new moves by watching the local wildlife interact with the environment.

Super Metroid's constant drip feed of new weapons and power-ups drew players deeper into Zebes' serpentine caverns like a siren's call. The Speed Booster let Samus reach Flash-like speeds and smash through otherwise impenetrable barriers, and the Grappling Beam allowed Samus to swing over vast chasms like a sci-fi Indiana Jones. By the end of the game, Samus became a one-woman army who could tackle any obstacle or foe put in front of her. A new automap feature even tracked your progress, making it easier to backtrack through the world to hunt down every last secret. Several games have tried to emulate Super Metroid's design, but few remain as fun as this 24-year-old classic.





019 MASS EFFECT 2

360, PC • 2010

While the original *Mass Effect* set the stage for an engrossing trilogy, the second entry was where BioWare brilliantly found its stride. With massive improvements to gameplay, a beloved cast, and interplanetary travel with diverse alien species, *Mass Effect 2* became one of the defining games of its generation. *Mass Effect 2* put you on a suicide mission, which added a tremendous amount of tension to the narrative as you built your crew and became invested in Commander Shepard's legend. The fate of the galaxy was placed in your hands, and how you decided to save it – by making allies or with a more ruthless approach – was entirely up to you.

Building diverse and beloved characters has become part of BioWare's DNA, and *Mass Effect 2* introduced some of the best personalities in video games to date. The *Normandy* was home to your crewmates, and returning to this space vessel in-between missions brought a welcome respite, allowing you to chat and even develop romances with members of your team.

Mass Effect 2 also introduced one of gaming's most complex villains, The Illusive Man, whose destructive intentions strictly put humanity first. Although his actions were questionable, his calculated reasoning gave him a certain sophistication that's rare for video game antagonists. *Mass Effect 2*'s focus on modern shooter gameplay amps up the action and offers a bigger breadth of enemy types than the original. The combat was fluid, and with gameplay deeply rooted in choice and consequence, *Mass Effect 2* became one of gaming's best offerings.



018 COUNTER-STRIKE

PC • 1999

Mods had been around for several years by 1999, but it was a Half-Life mod called Counter-Strike that popularized them. Combining a weapons-purchasing system with a frantic, objective-based mode where each player only has one life made the mod immensely popular, prompting Valve to acquire the IP. Nearly two decades of revisions later, Counter-Strike remains a fantastic game that captivates a massive audience thanks to its position as an esports powerhouse.



017 DIABLO II

PC • 2000

Blizzard's sequel to Diablo was a hack-and-slash phenomenon like few others thanks to its emphasis on online multiplayer, distinct character classes, and all the randomized dungeon delving, boss farming, and loot you could shake a Stone of Jordan at. The deep talent tree system, hardcore mode, and ladder play kept dungeon dwellers coming back for more well after release, with Blizzard still providing limited support to keep the game alive.



016 CHRONO TRIGGER

SNES • 1995

Developed by a dream team at Square, Chrono Trigger was destined for success from the onset. This beloved RPG defined many gamers' childhoods with its alluring visuals, charismatic characters, and breathtaking musical scores that amped up the tension during battles and accentuated the quieter moments. The time-bending story was full of twists and turns, with players journeying across the far-flung future to prehistoric times. It had a gripping narrative that included many different endings, encouraging players to revisit this gem to experience different outcomes. Its clever battle system was also noteworthy, where victory was rooted in cooperation between characters to pull off powerful combos. Between satisfying exploration and a beautiful world, Chrono Trigger ranks among the classics.

015 BIOSHOCK

360, PC • 2007

Without BioShock, we wouldn't have one of the most compelling and unique settings in the history of gaming: Rapture. Players explored this ruined underwater utopia and pieced together its history, using an assortment of guns and genetic modifications to keep an army of mutated residents at bay – not to mention bigwigs like Andrew Ryan and Sander Cohen. BioShock was a blast to play, letting you equip various augmentations to match your preferred approach to combat. Though plenty of fights were tough, nothing tested your resolve like run-ins with Big Daddies – hulking behemoths set on protecting Rapture's most valuable resources. BioShock's rich world, twisting tale, and complex subject matter (including fate, obsession, and objectivism) made your journey into its depths unlike any other shooter.



014 SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO

Arcade • 1994

Building on the rocky fundamentals of its predecessor's special moves, outsized characters, and flashy graphics, Street Fighter II added a multiplayer mode, unlocking the series' true potential as a communal experience. Would-be contenders flocked to arcades, spending millions of quarters to beat each other up, building long-lasting communities committed to determining who was the best fighter. Subsequent updates added characters and moves, and Turbo's new super attacks made fights more tense as a reversal of fortune was always around the corner. For all its medals as a pioneer, it's still a blast today. Anyone can pick up a controller (or arcade stick), throw a few punches or fireballs, and tap into the magic that makes fighting games special. You can't ask for much more than that.



013 DOOM

PC • 1993

Other first-person shooters existed before Doom, but id Software created a BFG-sized crater in the gaming landscape when it launched this seminal title in 1993. Doom made our jaws drop when we first saw its groundbreaking 3D graphics. Moments like ripping through a zombieman with a chainsaw or eviscerating a cacodemon with a well-placed shotgun blast made it the de facto topic of conversation amongst gamers, and many of us even snuck Doom onto our school's computers just to get our competitive multiplayer fix when the lab teacher wasn't looking.

The list of ways Doom changed the game industry forever is impressive. It created a new 3D future for game development, set the standard for developers embracing modding communities, and introduced the term "deathmatch" into the gaming lexicon thanks to its network play. Doom also used a shareware platform that allowed interested gamers to try before they buy, a practice that largely disappeared before returning with a bang as games entered the digital era. Rumor has it that by 1995, more computers in the world had Doom installed on them than the latest version of Windows.

Thanks to its massive success, Doom made id Software a household name and turned programmer John Carmack into game development royalty. Its legacy in the first-person genre and video games as a whole cannot be overstated; you can see traces of its design in every shooter to this day. 25 years later, the franchise is still going strong thanks to id's amazing recent reboot.

012 MINECRAFT

PC • 2009

In 2014, Microsoft purchased Minecraft and Mojang, the studio that developed it, for \$2.5 billion. Considering its cultural impact alone, it was money well spent. The game has become a global phenomenon, fueling a cottage industry of books, toys, clothing, and more. Not bad for a little indie from Sweden.

For a generation of younger players, the question isn't whether you play Minecraft, but how you play it. Thanks to a dizzying array of options, the act of playing Minecraft means a variety of fundamentally different things, depending on the player. Some players stuck with the vanilla adventure experience, searching its blocky, procedurally generated world for resources to build houses and mines – while battling zombies, spiders, and the now-ubiquitous Creeper. Others made the most of creative mode, tossing scarcity aside and constructing whatever struck their fancy.

For years, massive creations were shared online, with escalating size and complexity, such as ambitious recreations of *Game of Thrones* locations and complete versions of Pokémon that were actually playable thanks to methodical use of logic gates and virtual circuits. Modders used the game in unexpected ways, whether through servers that replicated *Hunger Games*-style combat or others that offered Pictionary-inspired competitions in 3D sculpting. In its brief-but-bountiful life, Minecraft has become its own platform. Regardless of how you chose to spend your time with the game, you are in for a wondrous and delightful experience.



011 MS. PAC-MAN

Arcade • 1981

In the late '70s, a group of MIT students had a brilliant idea: They would make a series of arcade mod chips and sell them for money. Their Pac-Man chip featured a little creature with legs called Crazy Otto, which proved to be incredibly popular with everyone except Midway, who held the distribution rights to Pac-Man. Fortunately, Midway decided not to sue. Instead, it officially released the mod as Ms. Pac-Man.

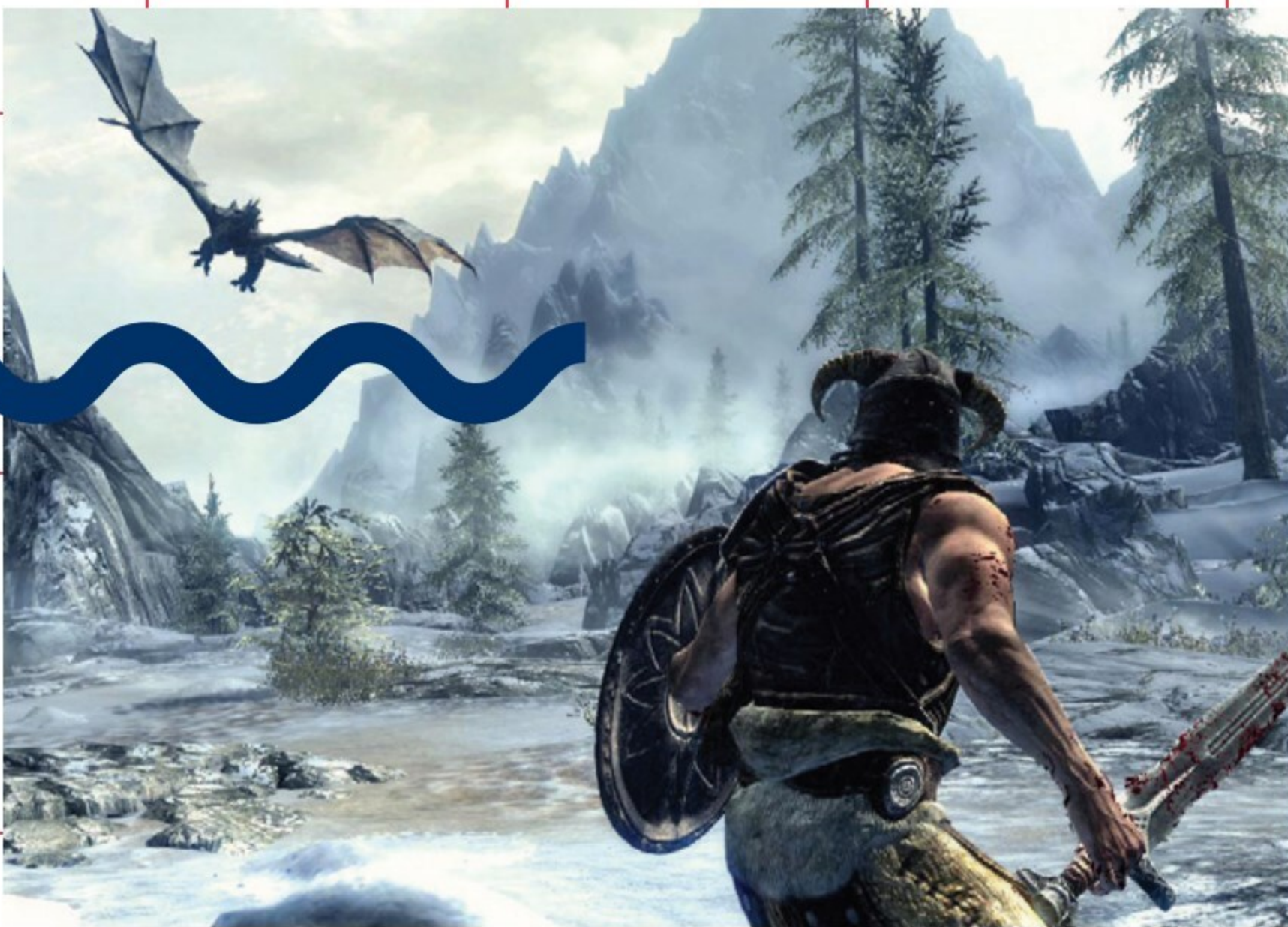
The original Pac-Man created a frenzy, but Ms. Pac-Man's new maze layouts and more complex ghost behavior made this sequel infinitely more replayable. Ms. Pac-Man even included a series of story animations that told the story of the Pac family, which was incredibly charming for the era. To this day, we can't walk past a Ms. Pac-Man cabinet without dropping in a quarter.



010 THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

PS4, Xbox One, PC • 2015

The Witcher 3 created a new high standard for modern open-world RPGs, and has yet to be topped in that area. The game's impressive scope is one thing, with a huge world and side quests galore, but CD Projekt Red also succeeded in terms of letting your actions have meaningful impact. Geralt's journey to protect Ciri, a young woman who's like a daughter to him, showed a new tender side to the antihero. The adventure was filled with unforgettable moments and choices that were far from pleasant, which only enhanced The Witcher's bleak world all the more. For all the fantastic content packed into this game, it's hard to believe it was CD Projekt Red's first true open-world outing, but the team exceeded expectations and elevated the RPG genre at the same time.



009 THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

PS3, 360, PC • 2011

Seven years later, and no open world role-playing game has the popularity, impact, and continued enthusiasm garnered by this most recent mainline Elder Scrolls game. Skyrim took the tenets that made its predecessors so exciting, and then evolved them into a formula that resonated with players and kept them engaged for years. Flying and fire-breathing dragons, breathtaking natural environments, a rich and nuanced character progression system, and hundreds of hours of quests and exploration all came together into a riveting fantasy that was hard to leave behind.

The allusions to Norse mythology and Northern European culture gave added life to a universe already brimming with fascinating races, magic, and godlike Daedric Princes. Thoughtfully crafted dungeons, forests, and cities made this a believable open world that was a delight to explore. Whether matching blades, casting spells, or shouting magical commands, combat made you feel like the Dragonborn warrior you were meant to be. But it wasn't just the broad strokes and core mechanics that helped set the game apart; in details like a created ancient language, seemingly endless stacks of in-fiction books and lore, and countless spoken-dialogue characters, this was a place and time that felt authentic and filled with the depth of history.

At launch, Skyrim redefined our expectations and set a new high bar for open-world fantasy adventures. In the years that followed, excellent official expansions and re-releases joined forces with an army of dedicated modders to keep breathing new life into the game long after its initial release.





008 RED DEAD REDEMPTION

PS3, 360 • 2010

The Wild West has been the focus of many films, plays, and books, but a successful game in the setting had been strikingly absent until the creators of the famed Grand Theft Auto series changed this in 2010 with the release of Red Dead Redemption. This open-world Western instantly became one of the studio's best works.

Rockstar took the phenomenal world-building it had spent years honing with Grand Theft Auto and applied it to a Western setting with great results. Despite the familiar pacing and structure, Red Dead Redemption improved many of GTA's elements and turned them into something fresh thanks to a gripping tale filled with beats that wouldn't be out of place in a Clint Eastwood script, a well-realized world with gorgeous expanses, and a surprisingly sympathetic-yet-gruff protagonist. Red Dead Redemption's narrative in particular led to an unforgettable finale that demonstrated Rockstar's devotion to well-written storytelling.

The world was further embellished in its online components. You could form a fearless posse with friends and roam freely, attacking outlaws or terrorizing towns. Playing competitively brought its own Western twist to popular modes like deathmatch and capture the flag.

Red Dead Redemption also featured fantastic gunplay, with each weapon feeling distinct. Dead Eye targeting further revolutionized this by having you slow down time to send a row of foes to an early grave. Whether you were robbing a train, assaulting a bandit camp, or biding time by playing Liar's Dice in town, Red Dead Redemption never ceased to offer an enthralling Wild West experience.



007 CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

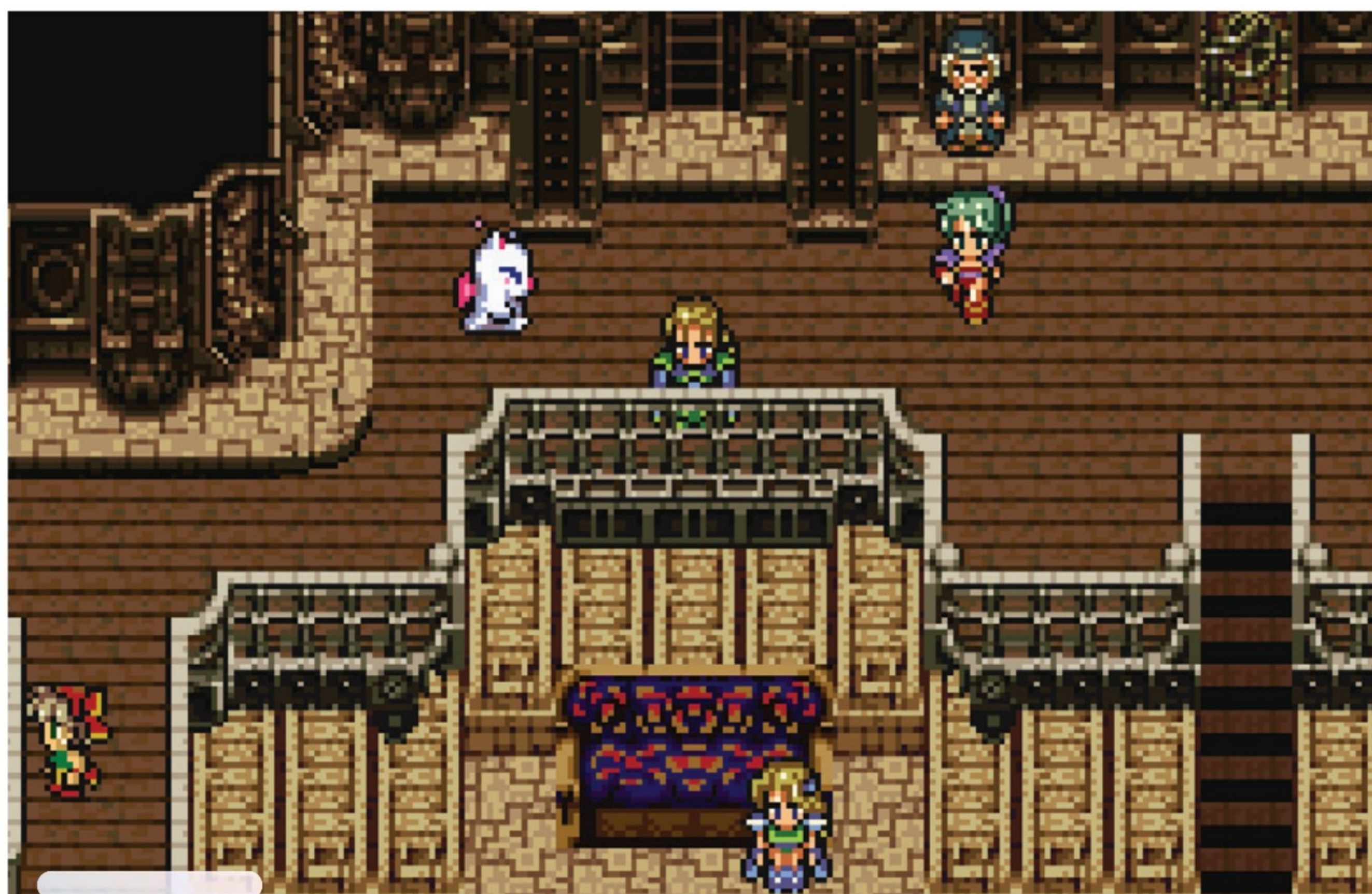
PS3, 360, PC • 2007

Leaving behind the series' love affair with World War II for modern-day covert options, Infinity Ward set a new standard for first-person shooters with Modern Warfare. The campaign fires on all cylinders, with amazing levels like the tense, stealth-focused "All Ghillied Up" and cinematic "Shock And Awe." To this day gamers still have trouble deciding on their favorite moment from a campaign packed to the brim with showstoppers like a surprise nuclear explosion, a showdown on a broken bridge, and the sinking of a tanker filled with terrorists.

The hefty multiplayer mode also introduced the staple Killstreak system, rewarding top players with air strikes and helicopters they could sic on foes. Though Battlefield 2 originally introduced the RPG-lite progression system, Modern Warfare refined it and became the standard that the vast majority of first-person shooters copied in the years that followed. The introduction of prestige mode also encouraged players to relive the progression system over and over again for bragging rights.

With Call of Duty being an annual series, the brand earns mounting (and debatable) criticism each year that it's grown stale and lacks the innovation of earlier titles. Still, the fourth Call of Duty is king for a reason. Modern Warfare laid the ground work for the modern first-person shooter formula, introducing innovations that have made its colossal shadow loom over the genre ever since.





006 FINAL FANTASY VI

SNES • 1994

The 16-bit era is full of amazing role-playing gems, so proclaiming Final Fantasy VI the best of them is an exceptionally high honor. Originally called Final Fantasy III in North America, this masterpiece from Squaresoft earned its place at the top with an unforgettable mixture of characters, story, and systems that have withstood the test of time.

The biggest problem with Final Fantasy VI could be deciding which moment was your favorite. The somber opening scenes? The groundbreaking opera house sequence? The world's descent into apocalyptic ruin? Even with those pillars holding up the narrative, the small touches kept the game engaging from one moment to the next. Piloting the airship (which used Mode-7 technology) was a thrill. Unique commands for every party member – like Sabin's blitz moves or Gau's rage – kept battles from getting stale. Every character got some time in the spotlight, despite the fact that your roster of 14 possible party members created the largest playable cast in the series. They were all working to stop Kefka, a psychotic mage who destroyed the world halfway through the game. That was another revolutionary aspect of Final Fantasy VI – the bad guy won, at least initially.

The second half of the game involved visiting familiar locations ravaged by Kefka, tracking down your friends in a hopelessly desolate land. Not only was this sad and surprising, but it also was an early incarnation of an open-world philosophy. By replacing a linear story with a series of smaller objectives, players could chart their own path through the story. Though later Final Fantasy entries continued to innovate in other ways, Final Fantasy VI was the best of an era perceived by many as the genre's brightest days.

005 WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PC • 2004

The game that made MMORPGs a household name, Blizzard's epic saga of orcs, humans, and everything in between remains a gaming staple more than a decade later. The experience of diving into the world of Azeroth and exploring every kobold cave, desert ruin, and lush dinosaur-laden crater was enough to suck anyone in, but the real game began when you joined up and started tackling end-game encounters with your carefully crafted character.

In World of Warcraft, it was all too easy to forget reality and find yourself lost in an incredible fantasy world where there was always something new to discover. While the core gameplay was enthralling and entertaining, the social aspects of the game took center stage. From five-person dives into the depths of necromantic bastions like Scholomance to 40-player raids into the fires of Molten Core, the social experience of making friendships, forming guilds, and taking on progressively more challenging encounters with insanely cool loot to show for it was the pinnacle of early WoW.

Years went by, and perhaps your mettle was tested in challenging-but-entertaining encounters with dragons in Blackwing Lair, blood elves in Tempest Keep, or the Lich King himself in Icecrown Citadel. The scenery changed over a series of expansions and content drops, but often, the community and friends you made along the way stayed the same. WoW continues to be the MMORPG that all others are compared to and measured against even today.



004 GRAND THEFT AUTO V

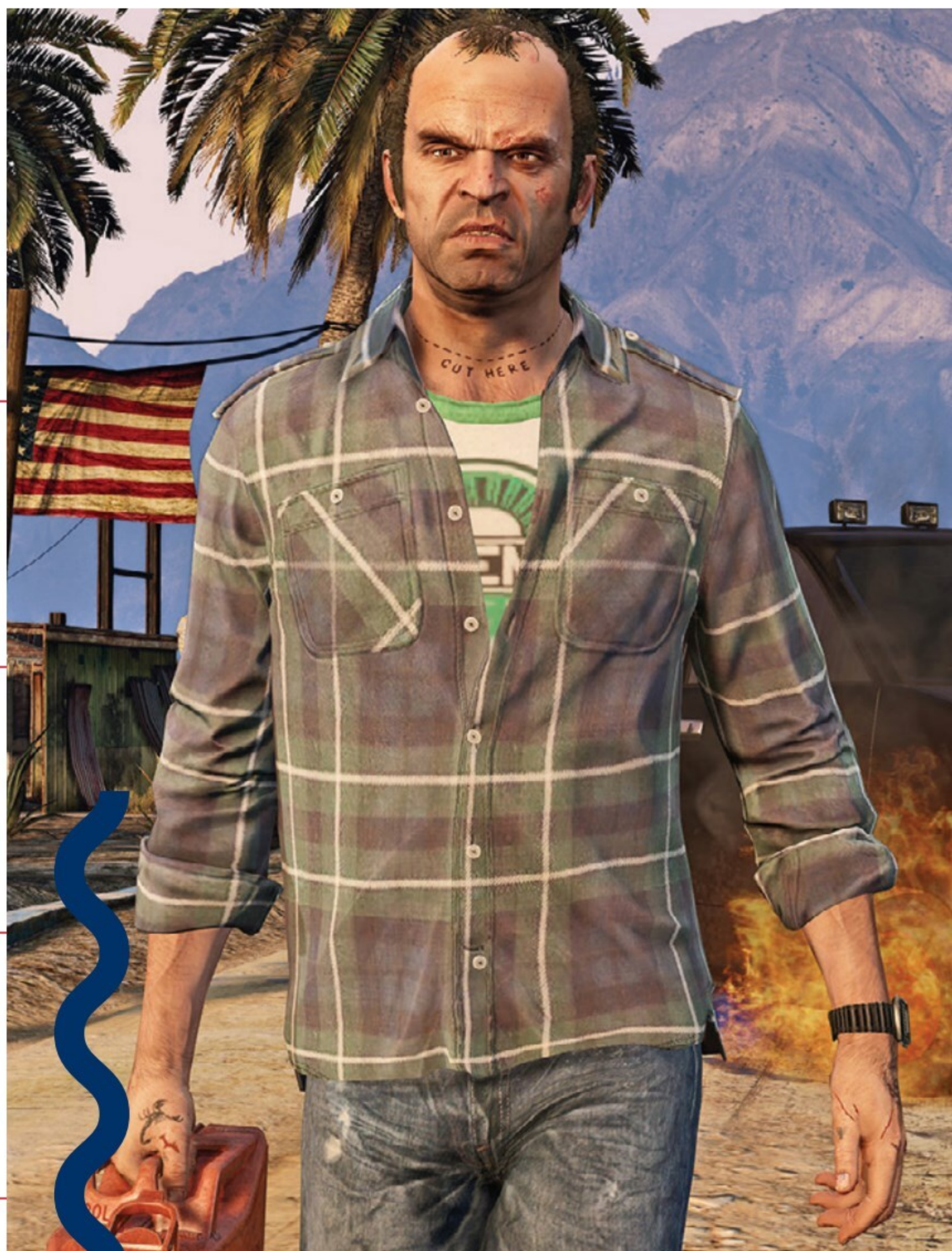
PS3, 360 • 2013

Expectations were sky-high when Rockstar Games announced Grand Theft Auto V, but no one imagined the game would deliver the depth and breadth of activities capable of sustaining one of the all-time great sales runs in video game history.

Rockstar first wowed us with GTA V's sprawling campaign, which for the first time gave players control of three characters they could swap between at any given moment. Divvying up the missions between antiheroes with distinct personalities allowed Rockstar to explore different mission types and personalities without making its well-rounded characters feel out of place. Burning down buildings and going on rampages felt natural with the psychopathic Trevor, while having more grounded characters like Michael allowed the narrative to lampoon modern family dynamics.

Then came GTA Online, a multiplayer playground filled with a diverse amount of activities and a never-ending stream of free content drops that evolved the experience in meaningful ways. Adding new vehicles, cosmetics, and multiplayer modes on a regular basis (and through a console transition) kept engagement high, and lapsed players were always enticed to return with expansions like heists and the introduction of player-driven criminal enterprises. Player engagement is currently at an all-time high.

But the biggest star of GTA V is the richly detailed, dynamic open world, which proved to be well suited for any type of experience the developers could throw at it. Rockstar has sold more than 85 million copies thus far, and the game shows no sign of slowing down.





003 TETRIS

PC • 1984

Move and rotate seven differently shaped objects as they tumble down the screen. Clear lines. Repeat. What Tetris lacks in depth, it makes up for in timeless perfection. For any other game, that might be hyperbole, but not in this instance. From the Elektronika 60 computer Alexey Pajitnov programmed the first iteration on to modern-day smartphones and every conceivable platform in-between, Tetris has remained engaging, entertaining, and infinitely replayable.

For many, Tetris served as their first casual introduction to video games. For others, Tetris is a life-long obsession, spawning demand for blistering offshoots like Tetris: The Grand Master series. The beauty of Tetris is its simple foundation can accommodate both play styles, not to mention the countless other spin-offs players have enjoyed over the decades.

Tetris single-handedly sold players on the Game Boy, launching a long legacy of handheld game systems that still remains central to Nintendo's business. Tetris holds the world record as the most ported game of all time. It has been played on the sides of skyscrapers and under an electron microscope using glass microspheres. Scientific studies have used Tetris as a method for treating lazy eye, cravings, and PTSD. When a person devotes so much time and focus on an activity that it invades their thoughts and dreams, scientists call it The Tetris Effect. Even if you haven't experienced the phenomenon yourself, it's easy to see how pop culture has undergone its own Tetris Effect for more than 30 years. We don't expect the love affair to end anytime soon.

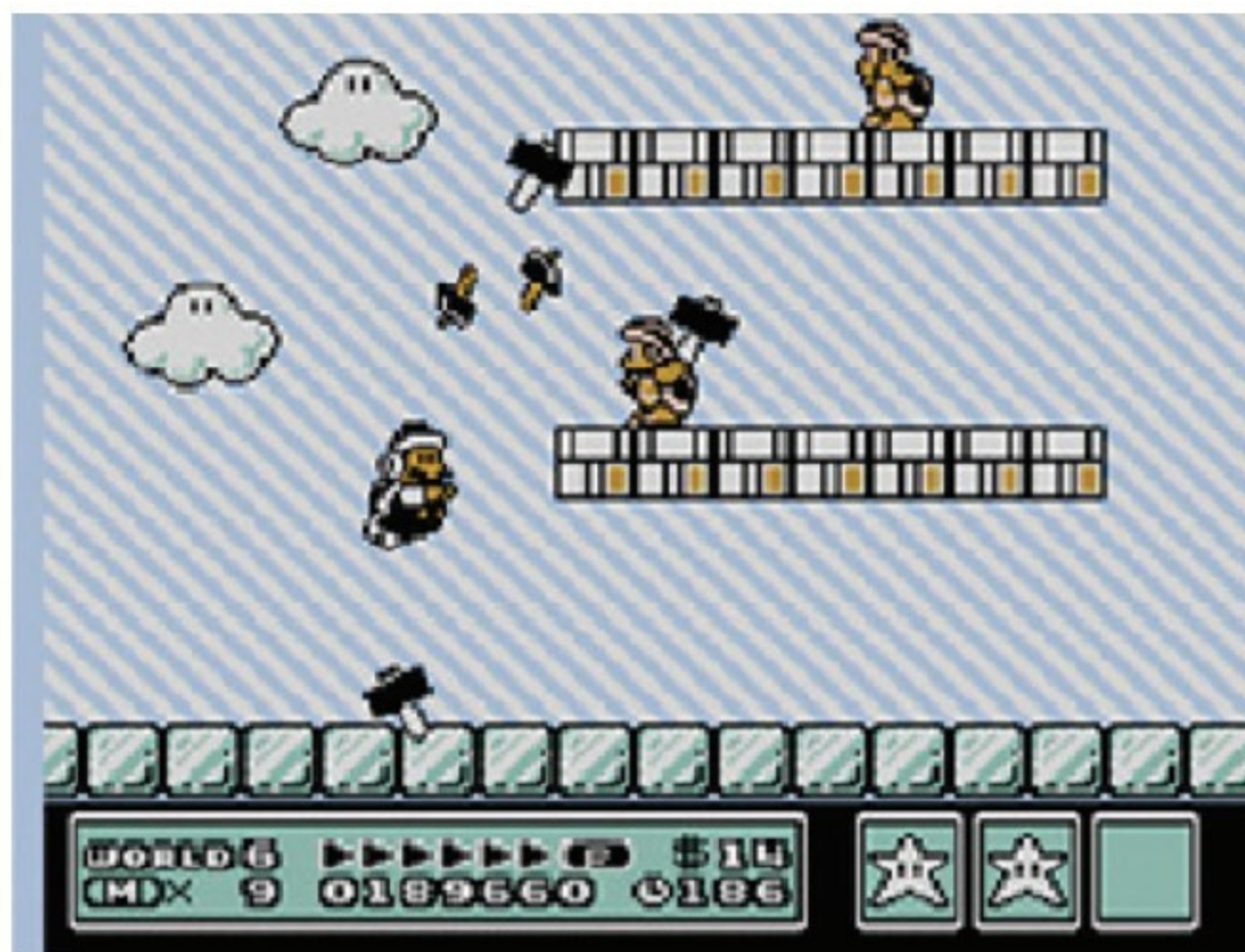
002 SUPER MARIO BROS. 3

NES • 1990

Nearly 30 years after it first released, Mario's third mainline adventure remains as captivating as ever. Its pixel art has aged beautifully, and its jaunty soundtrack still invites listeners to whistle along. Best of all, it's still a blast to play.

The game remained faithful to the original Super Mario Bros. while also pushing the level design and challenge ahead significantly. Super Mario Bros. 3 expanded Mario's power-up arsenal to include a variety of different suits, which gave the hero special abilities. While there was a certain appeal to being dressed as a frog or an honorary Hammer Brother, the Raccoon Tail was the star of the show. It gave Mario the ability to soar beyond the limits of the screen, which is where adventurous players could find some of the best secrets. The game introduced other elements that would be revisited throughout the years, such as an interactive overworld map, minigames, and, of course, Boo.

Super Mario Bros. 3 likely would have been a tremendous success based on its name recognition alone, but it was helped along by one of gaming history's oddest moments. *The Wizard*, starring Fred Savage and Jenny Lewis, hit theaters before this game debuted in the U.S. The video-game infused road movie culminated in a climactic Super Mario Bros. 3 competition, which helped create a sales frenzy where retailers couldn't keep the game in stock after it launched. That movie may not have stood the test of time, but the legacy of Mario's best entry continues to this day.





001 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

SNES • 1992

Almost every Zelda game is considered a breakthrough, and perhaps even one of the greatest games of all time. Next to Mario, no series of games has maintained such a high bar of excellence. Determining the order of the Zelda games on this list was a difficult task, as most entries had at least one supporter that gave a passionate plea as to why it should be on the list or higher than another game in the series. Oddly, the same cannot be said for A Link to the Past. Most *Game Informer* staffers put it at the top, not just for the series, but all games. It ended up being a runaway choice, both for its historical importance and the fun it still delivers today.

Although many of the series' conventions debuted on the NES in *The Legend of Zelda*, *A Link to the Past* defined the blueprint Nintendo has used for most sequels, and is still one of the most ambitious entries to date. Even without three-dimensional graphics technology, Nintendo designed the dungeons as multi-tiered constructs, creating puzzles that pushed players to drop down from higher areas and think about what a switch might activate on different levels. The brilliance in puzzle design extended to parallel realities through light and dark worlds, giving players twice as much to explore.

A Link to the Past still looks great today, and the clever gameplay concepts haven't lost any of their luster. Although we have a good idea of how each Zelda adventure will unfold, Nintendo has continually found ways to make these adventures magical. *A Link to the Past* is the prime example of how Nintendo gives fans more of what they want in ways they never imagined. 💎



gameinformer

GAME OF THE MONTH

89 Celeste

Celeste is an old-school, nail-biting climb up a mountain that keeps you on your toes thanks to its responsive controls, evolving mechanics, and surprisingly heartfelt story about struggling with anxiety. This month, other indie games like Crossing Souls and Inconoclasts can give you great retro fixes, but this hand-crafted journey from the creators of TowerFall is already the best platformer of the year so far.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.	5	Flawed. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.	4	Bad. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.	3	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.	2	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	1	Cosmetic duplicates.

AWARDS

gameinformer PLATINUM	Awarded to games that score between 9.75 and 10
gameinformer GOLD	Awarded to games that score between 9 and 9.5
gameinformer SILVER	Awarded to games that score between 8.5 and 8.75
gameinformer GAME OF THE MONTH	The award for the most outstanding game in the issue

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Iconoclasts

A wolf in Metroid clothing

9

gameinformer
GOLD

Style 1-Player Action Publisher Bifrost Entertainment Developer Joakim Sandberg Release January 23 Rating T

PS4 • Vita • PC

» Concept

Play as Robin, the lowly mechanic with a heart of gold, as she navigates a violent conflict between competing ideologies on a dying planet stripped of its resources

» Graphics

Each character is distinct and memorable, the backgrounds are detailed and full, and Robin's run animation just makes me happy

» Sound

Unabashedly retro, the excellent chiptune soundtrack has plenty of standout songs

» Playability

The platforming feels great and the act of attaching Robin's oversized wrench to bolts is satisfying

» Entertainment

Iconoclasts plays well, looks great, and has some strong level design, but the unexpected highlight is a narrative that examines topics like religion and environmentalism in a world with real consequences

» Replay Value

Moderate

Making a Metroid-inspired pixelated platformer as an independent developer is practically a rite of passage. We have seen plenty over the years, and for good reason – they're a lot of fun. Iconoclasts fits this mold and checks the right boxes with a confident red marker; the pixelated art looks great, figuring out how to explore each area and build out its map is a lot of fun, and both jumping and shooting are accurate. These elements alone would merit a recommendation. However, Iconoclasts takes its success a step further with an impactful story touching on topics not widely explored in video games.

Iconoclasts follows Robin, a smart mechanic with a big wrench who recently lost her father. The local religion, the One Concern, is integrated into every aspect of life, and it violently punishes those who go against its rules. The One Concern labels Robin a heretic for choosing to be a mechanic over the job selected for her. She rejects the One Concern's efforts to collect Ivory, the most valuable resource on the planet. Her actual mission is tough to nail down, which makes her journey all the more intriguing. She's not necessarily trying to save the world or favoring one side over the other. She's just trying to help those in need.

To delve deeper would spoil the game, but I was surprised by the

story's direction, what happened to its characters, and especially by the conclusion. Iconoclasts tackles religious zealotry, competing faiths, familial responsibility, environmentalism, and other serious themes, but it does so while maintaining a sense of humor about the video game medium and letting its characters be light-hearted at the right moments. Truly feeling the weight of an end-of-the-world scenario in a video game is rare, but Iconoclasts pulls it off. I was scared for everyone in the game, even its sympathetic villains, and I am still thinking of the story after seeing its closing credits.

Iconoclasts has a lot more going for it beyond the compelling story. Both its art and musical direction are great, and it plays well. Clearly drawing inspiration from Metroid, you reveal the map for each area by exploring it. Your arsenal of abilities doesn't expand dramatically over the course of the game, but figuring out how to get to new areas is still exciting thanks to a collection of clever puzzles that constantly make you use the tools you have in new and rewarding ways.

Backtracking is thankfully kept to a minimum, and on the occasions where you do have to retread, visual flourishes tease upcoming bosses, and handy shortcuts appear as a result of solving the necessary puzzle to get there in the first place. Of all the locations, the tower was the only one I

found frustrating thanks to a series of elevators and blocked paths that were not entirely clear on the map. This was the only area in the game I abandoned before solving every puzzle.

The rewards for the plentiful side puzzles are materials you exchange for minor upgrades. They can make you run a little faster, or make your wrench hit a little harder, but the number of slots you have to equip them is small. Even though I ended the game with lots of material, I only ended up making a handful of upgrades. Despite the underwhelming rewards, I still went after every piece of material just because I liked the puzzles I solved to get them.

The myriad bosses stand out thanks to their varied visual design, strategies, and implementation. In any game, I sometimes find too many bosses frustrating as they can act as gatekeepers to more exciting areas to explore, but I was excited to tackle each encounter, even at the end of the game, which throws a number of impressive bosses at you back to back.

With its Metroid trappings, Iconoclasts began as a familiar experience, but by the end I was left thinking more about the impactful character and narrative moments. Despite its bright and colorful aesthetic, Iconoclasts' world is dark, and the journey across it is one I did not expect to be so affected by. » **Kyle Hilliard**

Celeste

A mountain worth climbing



Style 1-Player Platforming Publisher Matt Makes Games
Developer Matt Makes Games Release January 25 Rating E10+

Mountain climbers don't climb mountains because it's easy. Difficult challenges are often intrinsically rewarding, and Celeste is that kind of experience. This adorable platformer about a troubled young woman named Madeline who pushes herself to climb a mountain is full of platforming sequences that mirror the heroine's own struggles. The journey isn't always easy, but the view from the top is spectacular.

Celeste's early levels feature a series of precise platforming challenges in the vein of indie hits like Super Meat Boy. However, Madeline can also climb up most vertical surfaces until her stamina runs out. Instead of a traditional double jump, Madeline performs a mid-air dash, which gives her a wider range of movement once she's airborne. I never grew tired of even the basic platforming sections thanks to the tight controls and the wide variety of aerial maneuvers. Jumping across a bottomless pit and then dashing up to find purchase on the side of a narrow pillar is incredibly harrowing, and Celeste is filled to the brim with exciting moments.

The basic mechanics aren't complex, but each stage puts a unique spin on the action. In one area, I used the momentum of several moving platforms to launch across wide chasms. In another section, I strung together a series of shimmering diamonds that refreshed the mid-air dash to perform



extended aerial stunts without touching the ground. Every time I started to grow tired of one environment, the game threw out a curveball and added some new element that made it feel fresh again.

Many of the platforming sequences offer a fair challenge, as well as occasional frustration. However, the reward of overcoming these trials always overshadows the bumps along the way. Those who want to mitigate their pain can turn on several assist mode options like more air dashes and immunity to environmental damage. Players can even skip troublesome levels altogether. If you want a heartier challenge, you can collect floating strawberries in hard-to-reach places. I enjoyed collecting these berries, but my efforts ultimately felt futile since you don't get anything for collecting them apart

from a relatively insignificant change to the ending.

Throughout your journey, you encounter a grouchy old woman, a fellow climber, and an awkward ghost, but the story ultimately centers on Madeline's struggle up the mountain while overcoming her own anxieties. I won't spoil the specifics, but the adventure is surprisingly heartfelt, and the clever dialogue and bizarre encounters are as compelling as the platforming.

Developer Matt Makes Games' previous release was TowerFall, the archery-themed four-player battle royale. With its single-player focus and touching narrative, Celeste might seem like an odd follow-up. However, like TowerFall, Celeste features polished and intense action that makes it easy to love and hard to put down. » Ben Reeves

9

PS4 • Xbox One
Switch • PC

» Concept

A side-scrolling platformer where a young woman climbs a mountain while wrestling with her personal demons

» Graphics

The stylish pixel graphics look good, but don't substantially set themselves apart

» Sound

This toe-tapping score might get stuck in your head, but the warbling each character makes when they talk rubbed me the wrong way

» Playability

Pitch-perfect controls and quick respawns encourage players to rise to these difficult platforming challenges

» Entertainment

A solid story and rewarding platforming sequences makes for a highly gratifying climb

» Replay Value

Moderately high



Crossing Souls

A nostalgic epic

9

gameinformer
GOLD

Style 1-Player Action Publisher Devolver Digital Developer Fourattic Release February 13 Rating T

PS4 • PC

» Concept

A band of teenagers in 1986 try to save a small Californian town from being taken over by a shadowy government outfit and other dark forces

» Graphics

The pixelated graphics are married to beautiful environmental design, resulting in one of the best looking retro-aesthetic games around

» Sound

The soundtrack is a great pastiche of '80s tracks that convincingly pay homage to the likes of John Williams and Ennio Morricone, but is strong enough to live outside of its influences

» Playability

Crossing Souls' tutorial is both informative and breezy, making the game easy to pick up and play

» Entertainment

Thanks to its robust battle system, intriguing character-switching puzzles, and beautiful storytelling, Crossing Souls is a fantastic adventure that goes beyond its nostalgic trappings

» Replay Value

Moderate



Crossing Souls makes no attempts to hide its love for the '80s. Within moments of the opening credits, the player is bombarded with images of *Ghostbusters* posters and references to Excitebike. However, this indie adventure doesn't just make nostalgia a pretty wrapper; it thematically mines the zeitgeist of the decade for all its worth. Beyond the pixelated veneer lurks a fun action game that tells a beautiful story about the power of friendship in the face of rampant greed and materialism.

You play as a band of five teenage friends trying to make it through the summer of '86 in the small California town of Tajunga. After one of them makes a disturbing discovery, the group squares off against supernatural forces hell-bent on wrecking their lives. While you start with the baseball-bat-wielding ringleader of the group, Chris, you soon gain the ability to switch among five kids with the tap of a button.

Every kid has their own stats and special traversal abilities. Chris is capable of parkour and climbing while Matt, a diligent nerd, can use his jet-pack to reach places others can't. To solve environmental puzzles you need to control all five characters and use their unique skills. For example, one puzzle requires Joe to move boxes around a labyrinth. However, to reach some of those boxes, you need to switch to Matt, who can fly around obstacles, and then switch back to Joe. The switching mechanic results in fun, impressive puzzle-solving with

solutions that emerge naturally from the characters' abilities instead of feeling forced or tedious.

The battles are also bolstered by the character-switching. Combat is initially presented as a basic hack-and-slash action game, but character-switching makes things more dynamic. Chris might be overwhelmed by four approaching enemies, but switching to Charlie makes short work of those foes thanks to her jump rope's wide attack and her enhanced evasive abilities. Switching to Joe lets you brute force your way through stronger enemies when Chris needs to recharge his stamina. The character-switching lets you develop strategies for any situation you come across on the battlefield, and the continual formation of strategies I made throughout my playthrough kept me entertained for the entirety of the game.

Characters aren't the only things that are switching in Crossing Souls. You gain access to a device that lets you flip between the lands of the living and the dead, so you go from fighting bullies to zombies, ghosts, and other supernatural foes. The world around you also changes; though you're still navigating the streets of Tajunga, you come across bizarre sights, like the ghosts of civil war soldiers huddled beneath a dinosaur, or cave men sitting around a living room. Some of these ghosts even give quests, like one understandably grumpy Native American who wants you to convince a suburban family not to build a pool over his grave. These quests are short

but worthwhile, rewarding you with fantastic dialogue and useful health recovery items.

Crossing Souls oozes style and charm. Tajunga feels like a lived-in place thanks to its eccentric denizens and the detailed art of its neighborhood and downtown distracts. The five characters you control are also likeable, with fears, ambitions, and desires that make them more than clones of the *Stand By Me* cast. The relationship between Chris and his brother as they navigate the troubles of adolescence and what it means to lose people they care about is a strong point. To delve too much into the story would spoil some of the fun, but I found the eight-hour journey to be immensely rewarding.

Crossing Souls is fantastically paced. Beyond fighting ghouls and exploration, you have to complete various mini-games. All of them are fun and challenging, especially a *Back To The Future*-inspired rhythm game that I won't say too much about. Crossing Souls changes things up exactly when it needs to, spacing fights out with quirky investigations and charming detours that endeared me to both the characters and the setting.

Crossing Souls is a inventive thrill ride that embraces clever, varied gameplay and heartfelt storytelling to coalesce into a gem of a game. As someone rarely wooed by '80s nostalgia grabs, I found an enchanting world worth exploring in this great adventure.

» Javy Gwaltney



UFC 3

From contender to champion



Style 1 or 2-Player Fighting (2-Player Online) Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Vancouver Release February 2 Rating T

8.75

PS4 • Xbox One

When EA Sports signed its deal with the UFC in 2012, the publisher had an uphill battle. The previous UFC series by Yuke's set a high bar EA initially struggled to meet. With UFC 3, EA Sports refines and sharpens the entire package, finally earning its place as the champ of mixed-martial-arts video games.

No game captures the calculated-yet-violent spirit of mixed martial arts better than UFC 3. The rush of entering the Octagon is well represented through both gameplay and presentation. You must always be on guard against both ruthless knockouts and technical submissions. Fights often turn into breathless affairs, keeping you on the edge of your seat. You may be winning the fight, but a single well-placed uppercut or takedown can easily turn the tide in your opponent's favor.

UFC 3's striking controls are the best yet, and new animations make for seamless transitions between moves. From simple face-button commands to more advanced shoulder button modifications, the stand-up game is intuitive and accessible while maintaining depth. New vulnerability windows leave you open to added damage when you attack to make striking a more careful art. This, when combined with a finely tuned stamina bar, balances out the fighters who come out swinging for the fences, as getting caught with a head kick in the middle of throwing a haymaker puts them in a precarious situation.

With how great UFC 3 looks and feels, I'm disappointed by how often the commentary fails to keep pace.

Play-by-play analyst Jon Anik is great in his debut, but longtime color commentator Joe Rogan adds little in the way of new voiceover, a noticeable detriment during banter between the two. In addition, the commentary sometimes lacks contextual awareness, with incorrect calls or set ups that give the wrong storyline.

UFC 3's overhauled career mode is a huge success, peppering in short-term goals to keep you engaged at every turn. I enjoy watching my fighter climb the ranks, but completing smaller goals every few fights to earn a better contract is more exciting. I also love how each contract gives me a new rival to trash-talk before facing off against them, and short cutscenes make each milestone more satisfying.

To become the greatest of all time, you need to perform well in and out of the Octagon. I love the balancing act between training and promoting during the lead up to a fight. Do you want to boost hype by bashing your opponent on social media, or learn a new submission that might come in handy during that fight? These tough questions make me look forward to each training camp as much as the fights themselves.

Popular one-off exhibitions like Knockout mode return (with Snoop Dogg delivering humorous commentary), while the new Tournaments feature allows you to set up bracket-style contests with custom rules. I'm glad Live Events are back, as I enjoy following along with real-world cards and picking who I think will win.

You can play online in ranked

championship in pursuit of a belt, or unranked quick-matches, resulting in a basic-yet-enjoyable suite. Online play is mostly lag-free, but I'm annoyed you can't skip the long-winded cutscenes unless both players agree to.

Ultimate Team introduces many new features. As you fight, you earn in-game currency, which is used to purchase packs. Each pack features fighters, moves, and consumable boosters that can be applied to different slots of fighters in your starting lineup. With items carrying different tiers of effectiveness, and better packs costing more coins, the mode tempts you with microtransactions. However, without paying any real money, I still fell into the addictive loop of earning coins through completing in fights and opening packs to improve my fighters.

Opening a pack to reveal the move you've been missing from one of your starters' arsenal is a thrill. I love that the online portion of Ultimate Team has been complemented by a single-player mode for those who don't want to throw down in the fiery gauntlet of online competition or worry about players who have paid money to acquire the best items.

By building on its already strong foundation and adding meaningful new gameplay and modes, UFC 3 delivers a terrific MMA experience from top to bottom. Whether you want to play against a friend in a single bout or develop a fighter from local favorite to greatest all time, UFC 3 allows you to live out the fantasy of stepping into the Octagon like never before.

» **Brian Shea**

» Concept

Deliver an improved iteration of EA Sports' UFC franchise with a revamped career mode, Ultimate Team, and striking controls

» Graphics

UFC 3's attention to detail is gorgeous, from the way fighters circle each other in the Octagon to the facial animations as an overhand right comes down on their cheek

» Sound

Play-by-play man Jon Anik is great in his series debut, but color commentator Joe Rogan adds few new lines, and the occasional lack of contextual awareness can ruin immersion

» Playability

Revamped striking makes for more intuitive controls than its predecessors, and managing your career outside of the Octagon is a thrill

» Entertainment

With an exceptional career mode and improved gameplay on top of its predecessor's already-strong offerings, UFC 3 is the best MMA game ever released

» Replay Value

High

Subnautica

A sea of infinite possibility

8.75

gamenformer
SILVER

Style 1-Player Adventure Publisher Unknown Worlds Entertainment
Developer Unknown Worlds Entertainment Release January 23 Rating E10+

PC • Mac

» Concept

Explore a huge ocean on an alien planet while gathering resources, building livable underwater spaces, and crafting equipment

» Graphics

Beautifully detailed underwater biomes come to life with their many sea creatures and exotic plant life

» Sound

Spectacular sound design makes your underwater adventure feel all that more real, with the growl and moans of distant predators and top-notch voice acting

» Playability

Whether you're operating a submarine or swimming in your diving suit, Subnautica consistently controls smoothly

» Entertainment

With a robust crafting system and several amazing secrets to find, Subnautica never ceases to entertain

» Replay Value

High

When I first plunged into the depths of Subnautica's vast sea, I was filled with awe. This underwater world is both familiar and otherworldly, with giant coral tunnels, uncharted caves, and alien-looking fish. Everywhere I turned, I discovered something exciting and grandiose, making this gripping survival game a joy to play.

Right from the start, Subnautica offers an engaging premise. After your crew's starship crashes on a watery planet, you take refuge aboard a tiny lifepod near the wreck. The planet you're stranded on is filled with both danger and intrigue, and you survive by gathering supplies, building sea bases, and managing your character's basic needs. These systems aren't too complicated or overwhelming, making it a pleasant start that becomes more intense as you progress to increasingly dangerous territory with scarcer resources and predatory enemies.

Subnautica offers different options for those who want to tune the difficulty of their experience. Freedom mode removes health and thirst gauges, hardcore mode limits players to a single life, and the creative mode is more of a sandbox with all buildable items unlocked. Each brings something unique, but I enjoyed survival mode the most. Here, you have to

manage your basic needs like health, thirst, and hunger. It makes you both curious and frightful of what awaits you in the dark waters, while also offering a rewarding balance of challenge and progression as you unlock new crafting formulas.

Crafting is one of the most enjoyable parts of Subnautica. Your lifepod is equipped with cutting-edge tech, including a wall-mounted fabricator that allows you to construct items from raw materials. As you venture into the unknown, you stumble upon wreckage you can scan for blueprints and discover necessary items to create new equipment. I was always excited to see what I could build next as I discovered new recipes. One of my favorite creations is a large submarine that lets you plunge deeper without worrying about air pressure or oxygen supplies, since it allows you to reach fantastical biomes and ancient alien structures that were once inaccessible.

Exploration is both rewarding and thrilling, as you progressively upgrade your gear to journey out farther. Whether you're entering a cave filled with glowing plants or freezing in fear as a colossal beast approaches, Subnautica always offers something new and compelling. To make these treks easier, you can build sea bases. These give you safe zones where

you can stock up, build items, and decorate the interiors to your liking. I enjoyed personalizing these spaces with different décor and discovering the functions of different rooms.

Long journeys, however, come with a cost. You have to be cautious, as they require you to stock up on food and water. Massive sea monsters also lurk in the shadows, and while you can build a knife or use decoys, they can still take you out quickly. This introduces a vulnerability akin to horror games, especially when traveling at night when visibility is reduced.

Subnautica's narrative is deeply rooted in exploration, and it's a well-crafted story despite diving into some science-fiction clichés. You can follow the story at your own pace, and this freedom brings an enjoyable variety to the gameplay. I often jumped between building my sea base, upgrading my equipment, and engaging in story missions.

Narrative missions are received through radio transmissions, where you listen to distress calls from other stranded crewmembers. These transmissions provide superb voice acting, which invested me in the plight of the characters. Upon listening to these messages, it's up to you to find these missing people or discover what happened to them. Sometimes this includes following coordinates to abandoned lifepods or investigating the crashed starship. These events all tie into a larger, captivating story about the daunting secrets this sea-like planet holds.

While I enjoyed following the story, I encountered a few bugs that required me to exit the game completely, such as getting stuck between walls. At one point, this caused me to lose 20 minutes of progress, because Subnautica allows only one save per world. This was mildly aggravating, but these isolated incidents didn't happen too often; the rest of the game performed without problems.

Subnautica is gorgeous and enthralling, offering rewarding progression and a fascinating world. The story is well told, and it offers a crafting system that is easily accessible even for players who aren't familiar with survival games. With fantastical sea beasts, fun gadgets to build, and a sci-fi story that gets its hooks into you, Subnautica is as deep as its sprawling ocean.

» Elise Favis



Civilization VI: Rise And Fall

Shining a polished gem

Style 1-Player Strategy (8-Player Online) **Publisher** 2K Games
Developer Firaxis Games **Release** February 8 **Rating** E10+



Loyalty isn't easy to come by. The kind of devotion that inspires poets is only built over time. Civilization VI's new Rise and Fall expansion takes this concept of loyalty and bakes it into Firaxis' incredibly robust sim. Lead your nation well and you inspire other city-states to rally to your side. Mismanage your population and even your most cherished municipalities could rise up in secession. Rise and Fall cleverly builds off existing designs without destroying Civilization VI's groundwork; it's the kind of smart design that has earned Firaxis its own loyal following.

Thanks to Rise and Fall's loyalty system, cities built further away from your capital are now more susceptible to the cultural influences of other nations. If those nations influence your city too much, that settlement might eventually run a new flag up the top of its courthouse. Micromanaging each city's loyalty is never tedious thanks to the addition of governors. These administrators can be installed in a city where they boost that city's loyalty. This push-and-pull mechanic adds a nice element to your strategy, and I loved exploiting it and pulling other nations cities over to my side.

Another change for Rise and Fall is a reworked era system. Manage your nation well and you enter a prosperous golden age. But if your nation slacks off, you suffer through a dark age that diminishes your population's happiness and loyalty.

This new era system didn't dramatically impact my overall strategy, but it is a playful way to chronicle time, and it gave me some short-term goals to aim for while I kept my eye on the global prize.

Rise and Fall adds numerous new leaders, buildings, units, and wonders. It also tinkers with the nation-building strategy in some bigger ways thanks to the additions of loyalty and golden ages. In the end, Rise and Fall's moment-to-moment action isn't dramatically different from the base game, but the new bells and whistles provide a good excuse to return to Firaxis' excellent strategy game.

» **Ben Reeves**



8.25

PC

» **Concept**

Take the robust strategy elements from Civilization VI and add a few new wrinkles to government management and population loyalty

» **Graphics**

Civilization VI's exaggerated art style remains eye-catching, and its old-world map aesthetic is beautiful

» **Sound**

The soundtrack is repetitive, but Sean Bean's voiceover remains killer

» **Playability**

Rise and Fall's web of menus is intimidating at first, but the built-in encyclopedia helps ease new players into the experience

» **Entertainment**

Complex and interwoven systems can be daunting, but building an empire remains incredibly rewarding

» **Replay Value**

High

geeked at birth



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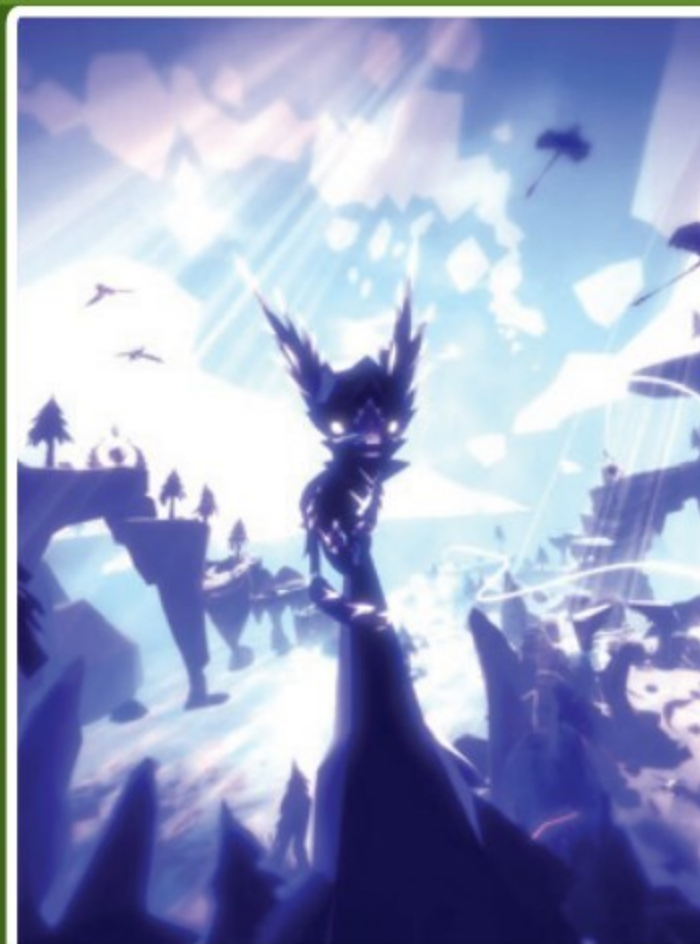
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6.5 Secret Of Mana

Platform PS4, Vita, PC **Release** February 15 **Rating** E10+

Square Enix's attempt to update the classic doesn't live up to the original's legacy, nor does it improve its more problematic elements. I enjoyed the trip down memory lane, but the Secret of Mana remake is middling in every way.

— **Kimberley Wallace**



5.5 Fe

Platform PS4, Xbox One, Switch, PC **Release** February 16 **Rating** E

I don't want Fe to be the red flag that makes Electronic Arts reconsider the great idea of supporting comparable projects, but nothing about Fe is exciting or interesting. It tries to tell a story about animals overcoming adversity in a large interconnected forest, but falls short in just about every aspect. — **Kyle Hilliard**



6 Dissidia Final Fantasy NT

Platform PS4 **Release** January 30 **Rating** T

The roster from across the series puts on a great show and is fun to customize and engage with, but the crux of the experience is the multiplayer, which doesn't hit home.

Unless you're a hardcore Final Fantasy fan that really wants to get Golbez a new outfit, it's not worth suffering through the arena for the perks. — **Daniel Tack**

6.5 Rust

Platform PC **Release** February 8 **Rating** NR

At the center of Rust lurks something fascinating, with the Wild-West sense of lawlessness and the exploration of trust and betrayal that emerges when trying to survive. Yet Rust's habit of tripping over its own feet makes it difficult to get to those fascinating stories. — **Javy Gwaltney**

8 Batman: Enemy Within Episode 4 — What Ails You

Platform PS4, Xbox One, PC, iOS **Release** January 23 **Rating** M

Familiar Telltale-brand problems rear their hydra heads more than a few times, like bad animation and a few tedious walk-around-the-room-and-look-at-things sequences, but the writing and tension prevalent through the episode is strong enough that those are easy to ignore this go round. — **Javy Gwaltney**

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From Sonic the Hedgehog's first run to Link's latest adventure, the history of video games is framed within *Game Informer*'s covers. While we are fond of each cover we've produced, here are the 20 that we feel are our best, both for the stories they tell, and the art that greets readers. *by Game Informer staff*



#001 FALL 1991
Sonic The Hedgehog



#033 JANUARY 1996
Super Mario 64



#078 OCTOBER 1999
Dreamcast



#134 JUNE 2004
(E3 VARIANT)
Grand Theft Auto:
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#156 APRIL 2006
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#161 SEPTEMBER 2006
Bully



#181 MAY 2008
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Epic Mickey



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Portal 2



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BioShock Infinite



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30 Characters Who
Defined A Generation



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Far Cry 4



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Rise Of The
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